Commentary

Volume Seventy-four, Number Three, September 1982

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James Nuechterlein

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MOVIES: Violence for the Educated
Richard Grenier

BOOKS:
Hillel Halkin
Adam B. Ulam
Peter Shaw
Nathan Glazer

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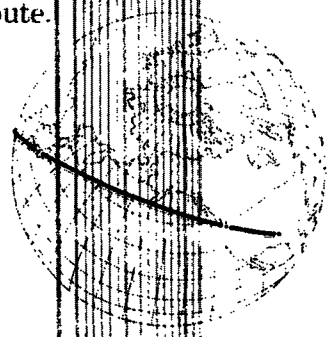

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Thai

A Flight of Graciousness.

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A Simplified Income Tax

Imagine an income tax so simple and straightforward that all you do is add up your income for the year and send a modest percentage of it to Uncle Sam. No deductions. No shelters. No loopholes. The same rate would apply to all, across the board.

The idea of a flat-rate tax has been around for years. Today it's bubbling up afresh in the mounting frustration over budget deficits and the nation's economic troubles, along with public disaffection with the existing tax system.

The flat tax has supporters in both parties and across the political spectrum. Several bills on it have been introduced in Congress. The tax rates being discussed generally range below 25%. The top rate is now 50%.

Advocates see the flat tax as a way to stimulate productive enterprise and steer the economy back on a growth path. The idea is that people would be encouraged to work harder, take greater risks, and invest and save more because they'd be able to keep more of what they earned. No longer would they be taxed at ever-higher rates as their income rose.

In addition, proponents say, there would be more equity in the tax system. All would pay their fair share. Shelters and loopholes would be done away with. Cheating through fraudulent deductions would be eliminated.

In pure form, a flat tax would have no exemptions or deductions. But purity would have to give way to practicality. There should be an element of progressiveness: higher rates for higher income earners.

Most current discussion centers on providing for a base of exempt income. The exemption, for example, could be the first $10,000 of income. With a flat rate of 10%, someone with an income of $20,000 would pay a tax of $1,000. The effective rate would be 5%. A person with $100,000 in income would pay a tax of $9,000, or an effective rate of 9%.

Greater progressivity could be achieved through a tax of two or three tiers. One proposal calls for no tax on income below $17,500, a rate of 18% on incomes from $17,500 to $50,000, and 25% above $50,000.

Numerous options are being discussed. One is to have no income exempted from taxation. Instead, each person would get a $250 tax credit. For a family of four, total credit of $1,000 would be equivalent to an exemption of $10,000, given a 10% rate.

Arriving at a simple flat tax would be anything but simple. State and local governments depend on their ability to issue tax-free bonds. Institutions, organizations, and causes of all sorts need contributions that are now tax-deductible. Homeowners cherish the deductibility of their mortgage interest. All these things would have to be worked out carefully.

A streamlined tax has considerable appeal in its potential for simplicity, fairness, and revenue-raising effectiveness. It's an idea that merits full scrutiny and debate.

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Commentary

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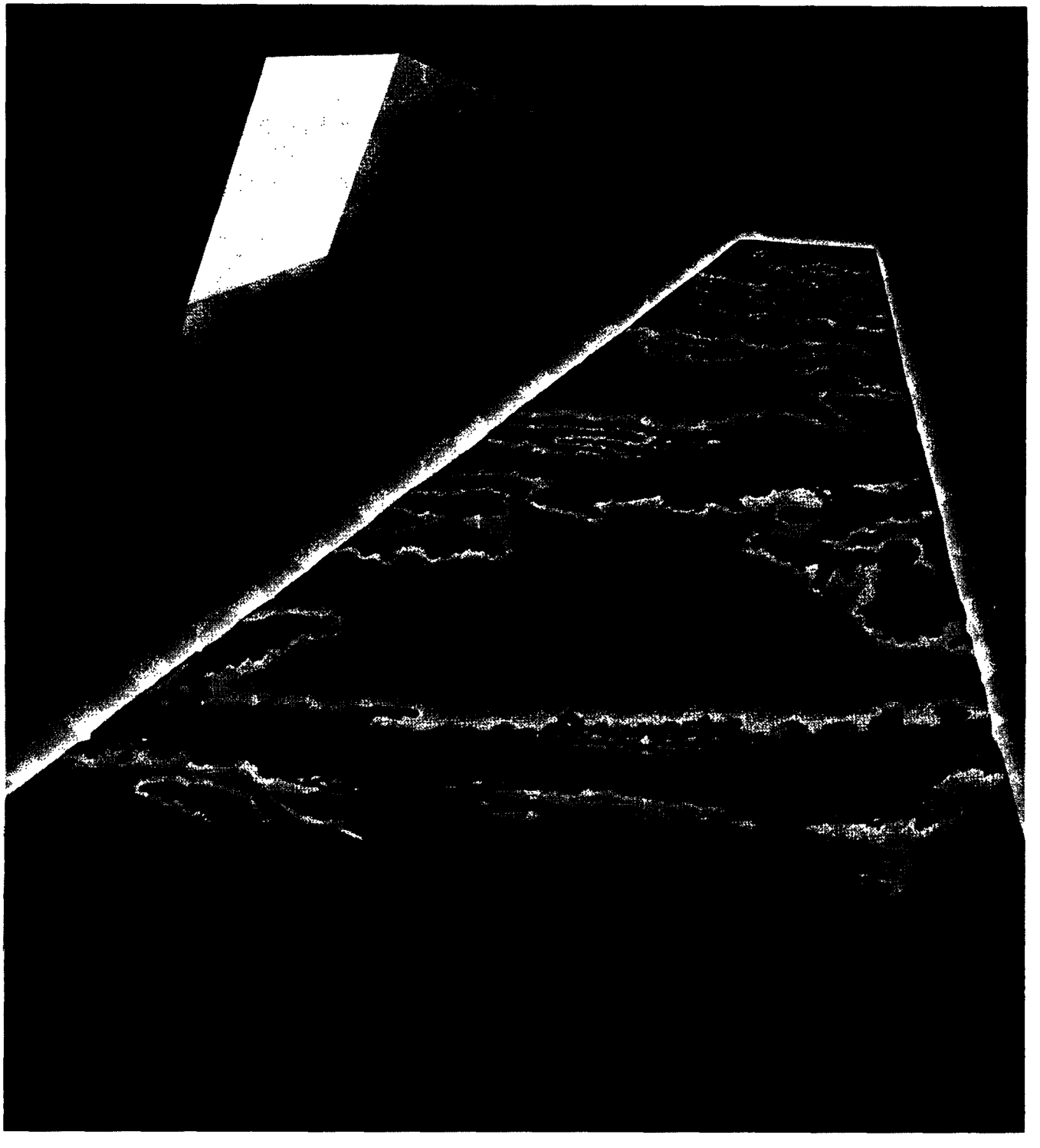

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Letters from Readers

Kissinger & Sholom Aleichem

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Norman Podhoretz's otherwise splendid "Kissinger Reconsidered" [June] overlooks one important purpose underlying the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy: namely, promoting the interests of American big business by expanding the market for American goods and services overseas.

Richard Nixon was long affiliated with big business interests; for example, his partnership in a large Wall Street law firm. Henry Kissinger was for many years closely associated with the Rockefeller financial interests.

When we examine our foreign policy in economic and business terms rather than in terms of military strategy, the apparent incongruities puzzling Mr. Podhoretz clear up immediately. Mr. Podhoretz wonders what we have achieved by the opening to China, because ". . . the number of Soviet divisions pinned down on the Chinese border . . . has not increased." The answer is, of course, that a potentially huge market for American products—from Coca Cola to computers—was tapped. Another great field of operation was opened for the giant American financial institutions, construction firms, and energy companies which exert such dominant influence in Washington.

JOEL M. MARTEL
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Norman Podhoretz has, I think, justly assessed the brilliance of Henry Kissinger's memoirs and also the penetrating political acumen which distinguishes Kissinger's writing from the work of many other statesmen and political figures. But I write to share an unexpected discovery in the early pages of the second volume of Kissinger's memoirs, *Years of Upheaval*. After the signing of the Paris Agreement, Kissinger visited Hanoi to discuss various pending problems with Pham Van Dong and Le Duc Tho. This is how he describes the way they tried to confuse and obstruct these talks: "There is the story of a law professor who taught his students how to take advantage of every possible defense. If one's client is accused of stealing a black pot, the tactic should be to reply: 'My client did not steal anything. In any case it was not a pot that he stole, and the pot was not black.' "

How have the lowly been elevated! That law professor is a transmogrification of Yente, the poulterer, the nonstop talker of Sholom Aleichem's monologue, "The Pot." You will recall that Yente accused one of her customers of having borrowed a good pot and then returning a beat-up one. To which the woman replied: "First of all, I gave you back a good pot; secondly, when I borrowed the pot, it was all beat up; and thirdly, I never borrowed a pot at all, because I have my own."

Kissinger's version amuses and saddens. It illustrates the problems of cultural transmission, at least with regard to the world of Yiddish. In this instance Sholom Aleichem has undergone a sea-change so profound that no resonance of the original Yiddish has remained. It is, of course, highly unlikely that Kissinger, whose childhood was spent in Fürth, ever heard of Sholom Aleichem, much less read him. We have no idea how Yente's story came to him and in what state of mutilation by the time it reached him. But in its present rendering all traces of the story's Yiddish origin have disappeared.

The culture of Yiddish seems to have bad luck in high places in our government, regardless of political party. Jimmy Carter, too, was a victim of a faulty transmission from the world of Yiddish. On November 5, 1980, in a talk on national television conceding the election to Ronald Reagan, Carter said: "There's an old Yiddish proverb that I've often thought of in the days and months that I've held this office. It says simply, 'God gives burdens, also shoulders.' "

But presidential authority notwithstanding, there was and is no such proverb. After Carter finished speaking, Yiddish folklorists rushed to their books and ransacked their memories but they couldn't come up with any such proverb. Yiddish has an expression, "*untershteln an aksl*" ("lending a shoulder"), which means simply to help shoulder a burden. I wouldn't be at all surprised if whoever had passed on the putative proverb to the President had confused that expression with an altogether different proverb of an altogether different meaning, to wit: "God provides the remedy for

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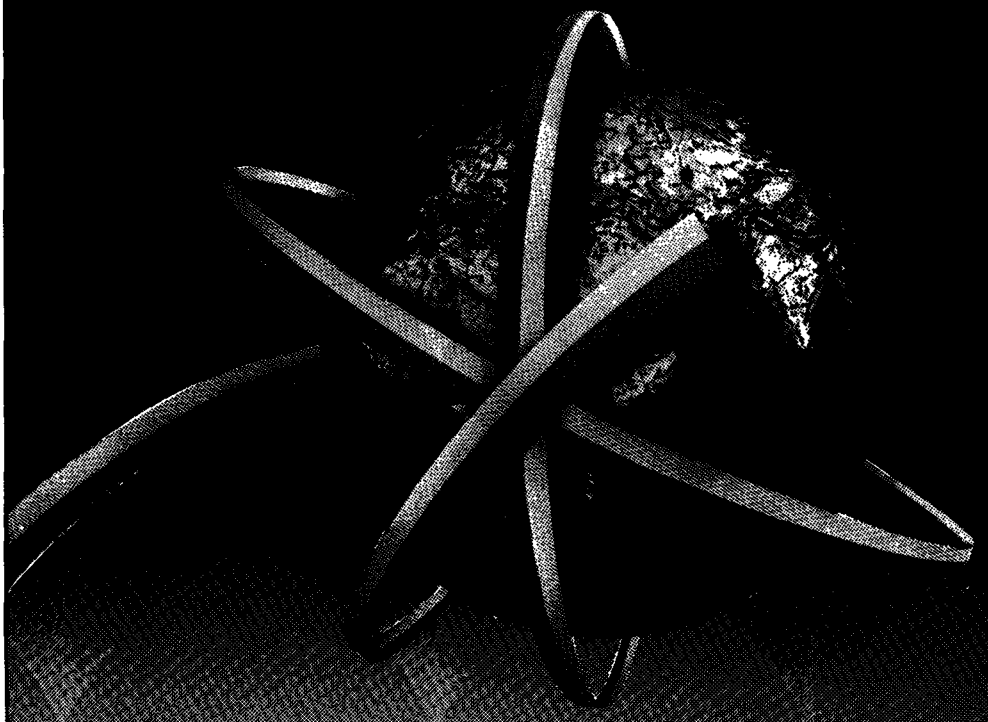

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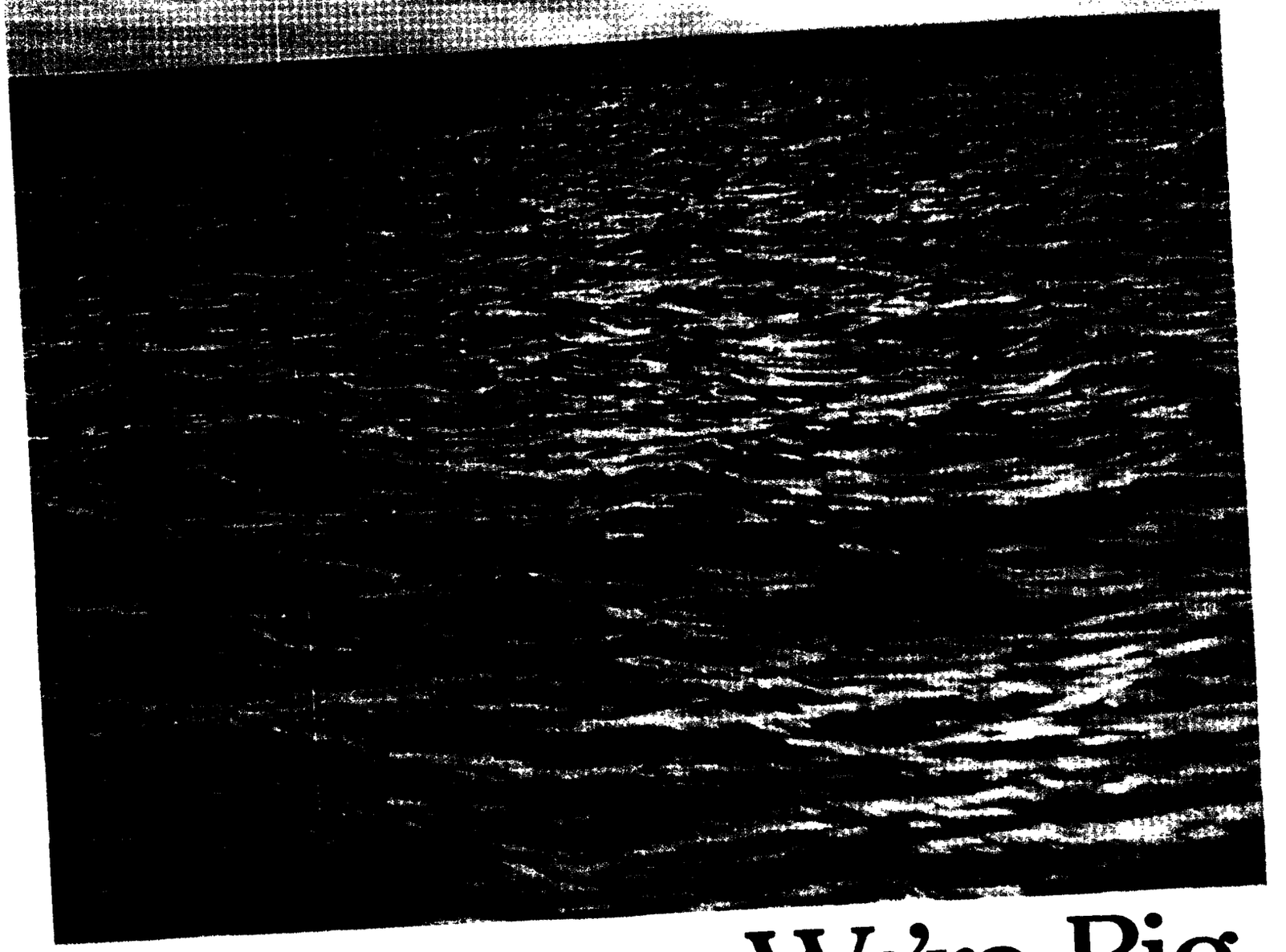

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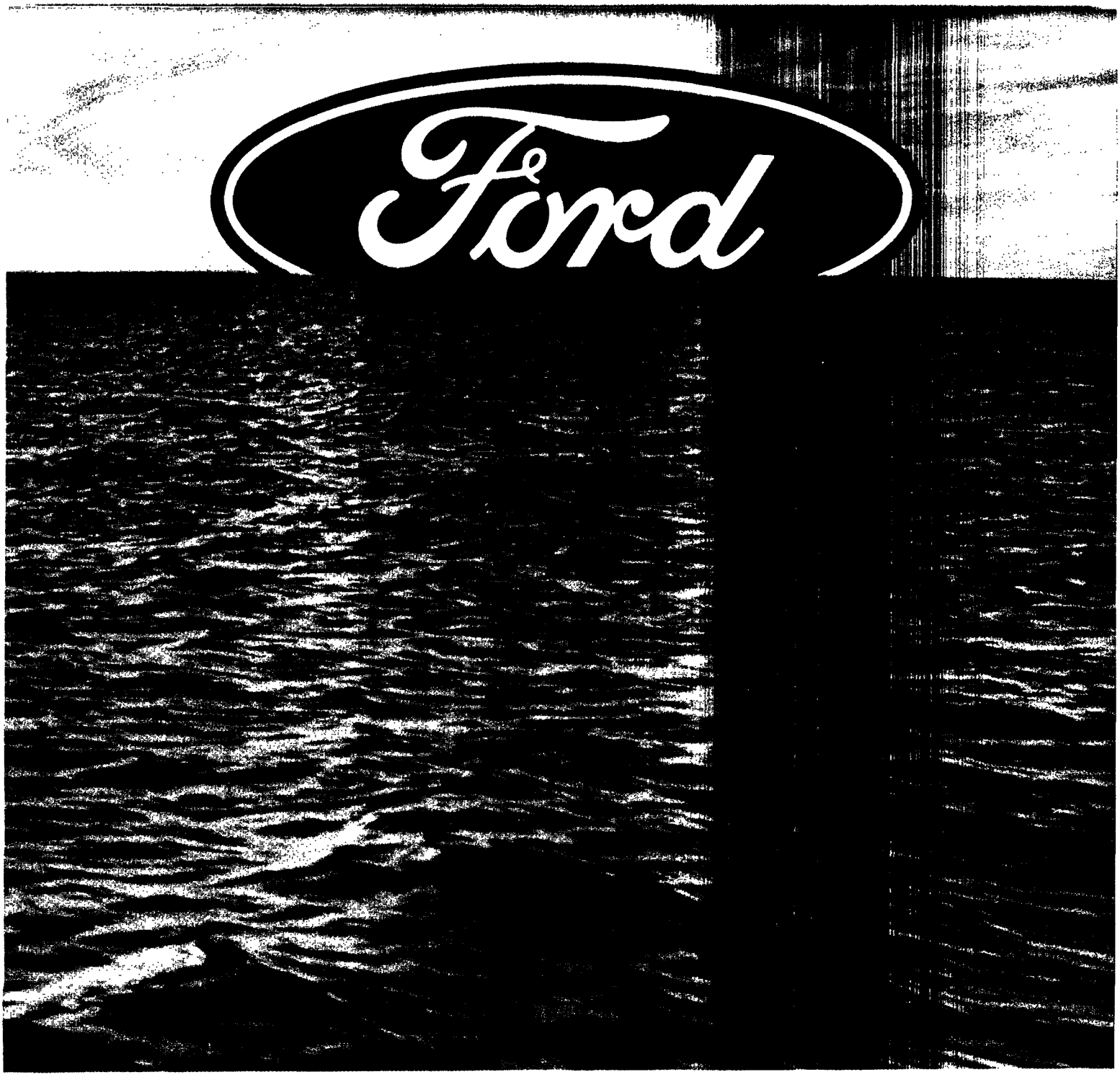

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the sickness." It seems to me quite probable that one of Carter's staff, born Jewish but not born-again Jewish, dredged up from a sluggish memory some garbled recollection of a Yiddish phrase which he may have heard in his childhood.

I seem to have rambled considerably from Henry Kissinger and his extraordinary book. But his funny story about the law professor has made me quite melancholy. The world of Sholom Aleichem seems to be as remote as ancient Troy.

LUCY S. DAWIDOWICZ
New York City

Victims & Victimizers

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I have just read Roger Starr's impressive article, "Blaming the (Jewish) Victim" [June]. He describes an unfortunate human reaction that is apparently universal. To the example he gives of the destruction of European Jewry one can add the massacres in recent times in Uganda, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Cambodia —the protests against these outrages were few and far between.

JACK RUDIN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . I'm afraid I see only a caricature of our conversation at lunch in what one of my dearest friends Roger Starr has written. He seemed to see something menacing in my criticism of his (generally) uncritical support of Menachem Begin. Yet I am told that in Israel many people criticize Begin openly; only in the United States is such criticism muted—which was one of my main points.

I now think that the refusal of a great number of American Jews to criticize Begin publicly may have been one of the things which emboldened him for his military campaign in Lebanon, which may in the end result in a further substantial loss of world and American support, not to mention the horrendous destruction.

Mr. Starr asks, "Why does the Iraqi attack on Iran not elicit the same resentment as the attack by Israel on the Iraqi reactor?" Surely the answer is that it is America which finances and supplies the military equipment for Israel, while this country does not finance and supply the military equipment for Iraq. I am surprised that he is able to overlook this important difference. (There are even some who believe that Israel has been violating the American law which forbids the use of American arms except for self-defense.)

It is encouraging that Mr. Starr does not think that Israel and American Jews have undue influence on American policy in the Middle East. As, under the impact of Beginism, this influence begins to wane, it may turn out he is right.

But it is his recollections of the past which I find most surprising. I do not remember ever having the kind of enthusasim for Hitler he ascribes to me. As a pacifist I could not have enthusiasm for Hitler, who was from the beginning a militarist. My admiration was for people like Einstein, who at that point was a member of the War Resisters League, which I joined. The War Resisters League, I assure you, never had any enthusiasm for Hitler.

What I do remember, and what I constantly expressed in those days, was the isolationist feeling that Hitler and Stalin should be allowed to destroy each other, while we stayed out of it, because I was convinced that after the war we would still have to deal with the Communists, but then from a far less advantageous position. I do remember expressing this point of view to many people, including, I think, Roger Starr. . . .

One thing about the article which I like and which I think goes to a deeper level is where he speaks of the "immense importance" that Ian Gilmour and I "attach to anything the Jewish state does or does not do." I cannot speak for Gilmour, but I do attach immense importance not just to the Jewish state, but to the Jews. (Erich Gutkind used to say that in some way I was a Jew because I was so drawn to him and to Judaism.) *Why*? I think it is because the Jews seem to me (I don't know if this will seem odd) the key to (Western) history. I see them as, in a certain sense, the most typical, the most human. They represent one side of that history—the "peoplehood" side (not the sanctity-of-the-individual side). They represent, perhaps, "peoplehood" raised to a higher degree (supernatural?).

It is not, for me, a question of the Jews' having "done something very wrong" (or, what is more true, something very wrong having been done to them), although this is the form in which history has presented the matter. It is rather a question of whether very different points of view can ever be reconciled (as it were, in the *heart*, and not merely in the *head*). The Jews are a kind of testing ground; and so in equal degree are the Christians, the serious ones. The questions which plague the Jews—What is a Jew? What is a people? . . . Is there a special role for the Jews?—these are *human* questions, even if not recognized as such. Today they zero in on the problem of the relation between a *people* and a *nation*. Einstein, Gutkind, Buber, Magnes, Ben-Gurion understood this one way. Begin, Roger Starr, and the American Jews another. (Begin brings in ancient religious sanctions, which Mr. Starr does not, and could it turn out that he knows something Mr. Starr does not?)

I don't remember ever thinking "If the Germans mistreated the Jews, then the Jews must have done something wrong." This is the way Roger Starr thinks some people must have thought. Perhaps it is the only way which seems to make sense out of the horrifying indifference—but what sense? I think what he says overlooks a number of things: that American Jews apparently also largely shared this indifference; that World War I had wounded Europe, not just physically, but also spiritually; that nationalism everywhere now contains a pathological element. None of this *excuses* anything. There are no "excuses." There is only an enormous historical failure of understanding, one that I desperately hope will not be allowed to continue.

As for the emotional element—the attempt to get even the most fair-minded and intelligent Jews just to *listen* to the Palestinian case sometimes runs into a blank wall. No wonder frustration and friction are aroused. And the opposite is certainly just as bad, even though we do not encounter this so often. I have heard some of the most humane and kindly Jews speak about the Palestinians as if they were animals and did not exist, and I imagine Roger Starr has too. Is it not time to do something about this? Or would he just leave it like that?

One last comment: it is hard to think of the Jews any longer as *victims*. According to Senator John Glenn on *Meet the Press* (June 27), Israel now has the *third* largest military force in the world. Recognizing all the historical points which Mr. Starr makes and which I believe to be correct, though incomplete, *nevertheless*, given this overwhelming military superiority, are the Israelis not now victimizing the Pales-

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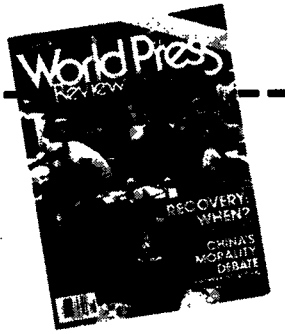

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tinian and Lebanese people? There are many of us who think so. The victims have become the victimizers.

ROY FINCH
New Rochelle, New York

ROGER STARR writes:

Since Roy Finch calls my account of our conversation a "caricature," without specifying how it exaggerates or distorts the essence of what we said to each other, I will call the crucial paragraph of his letter a travesty of the way in which intellectualizing abstractions make reality less, not more, comprehensible.

Jews, he says, are a testing ground, presumably of the moral worth of others. Jews pose to themselves and others, he says in the same paragraph, the tantalizing questions of whether they are a people or a nation, and whether they can be both at the same time.

These questions have been discussed for centuries. Regrettably, they were resolved in the short years preceding and during World War II, in the most advanced countries of the Western world. On the testing ground of their treatment of their Jewish minority, Europeans—with some touching and heroic exceptions—failed.

On the question of whether Jews comprised a religious body, a people, or a nation, it became clear that to their enemies the religious beliefs of the Jews were not what was important. They were sent to the slaughter even when—and this seems unique in the chronicle of Christianity's bloody doctrinal wars—they had shed for as many as three generations the religion that was the ostensible reason for their persecution.

When peace came to a continent practically rid of Jews, with those still alive finding themselves in makeshift prisons of exile, it was more obvious than ever that the Jews as a people could survive only if they set up a state of their own. The plan for dividing the British Mandate, or what was left of it after the establishment of Jordan, between Jews and local Arabs failed. The Jews did not reject the partition or oppose the establishment of a new Arab state; the Arabs living in Palestine did, not considering themselves "Palestinians" but rather members of the Arab "nation." They expected that the partition would be annulled by the Arab Legion and other forces, and that the Jews would be hurled off the land.

When military adventure failed, and Jordan took over what was to have been Arab Palestine, the new Israelis did what they could to conciliate their neighbors. They treated resident Arabs in their hospitals and clinics, helped raise their standard of living, improved their education, gave them civil, political, and religious freedoms. The external Arab states, however, maintained a state of belligerency: most emphatically when Egypt in 1967 demanded the withdrawal of the United Nations peacekeeping force as an obvious preliminary to the resumption of hostilities.

Everyone remembers that the Israelis won the war that followed. Few recall that, far from using the victory as the occasion for exterminating their defeated enemies, as the Arabs threatened then and continue to threaten today, Israel did not invoke the death penalty against even one terrorist convicted of murdering civilian noncombatants in cold blood. It never has.

Are there Jews in Israel who speak ill of Arabs? Certainly. Are there Jews who believe in the religious justification of a larger Jewish state? Of course. There are also many vocal Jews in Israel, by far the great majority, who want nothing so much as to live in peace surrounded by nations who share a commitment to cultural exchange, trade, and joint economic development. Of their neighbors, only Egypt shares this view, and then largely because Israel's armed forces were strong enough to repel an invasion that came close to making good the pledge to exterminate the Jews.

Mr. Finch says that the size of those armed forces makes it difficult to view the Jews as victims. He should rather understand that the armed forces are the very essence of the Israelis' victimization. They are a nearly intolerable burden on Israeli life and its economy, but they are what stand between Israel and the shrill threats to expunge it from the map. The threats are made real by the refusal of the Arab states to recognize Israel, by their efforts to throw it out of the United Nations, and by the inability of some states, notably Lebanon, to prevent incursions and bombardments and the build-up of immense stocks of military equipment by those who are still blatantly at war with Israel, including, of course, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Let me repeat what I wrote earlier. There must remain a powerful armed force in Israel at least until the neighboring states freely and sincerely recognize its existence diplomatically and sign a peace treaty with it. The only *a priori* condition of peace negotiations is such a recognition. To suggest that the Palestine Liberation Organization has met this condition while it has loudly called out for Israel's extermination, or even "secretly" accepted its existence, is to play tricks with words. One might as well say that Hitler did not mean what he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, or that World War II was started by the Czechs when they mistreated the Sudeten Germans.

For me, the stunning aspect of current attitudes toward Israel and its neighbors is the speed with which many Western Christians switched their postwar sympathy for Jewish survivors and pioneering farmers in Palestine into contempt and fear. It is as though Israelis are considered to have forfeited the right to resist being taken to the slaughterhouse a second time. Although I am somewhat shocked to find myself writing these words, it seems that the Jews were thought by many Christians to have completed their historic mission when they turned their backs on the Christian savior, and the rest of their destiny is pain.

Feminism and Education

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "Feminism & Thought Control" [June] Michael Levin doesn't tell the half of it. Textbook editors deliberately distort American cultural history in order to advance the new orthodoxy.

For example, in a 1979 American literature text from Scott, Foresman, there is a study question which goes roughly: "Edith Wharton was the first woman to achieve critical and financial success as a writer. What factors made it difficult for women to succeed as writers before this time?" Since Edith Wharton first achieved success in the 1890's, the editors with one stroke have created non-persons out of all the successful women authors, essayists, poets, lecturers, etc., who had virtually dominated American popular literature since Sarah Hale was made the first editor of *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1839.

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This might be simple illiteracy on the part of the editors, since they seem to have been chosen for political rather than scholarly reasons, but it is interesting to note that the authors have uncovered a number of unpublished diaries and suffragette speeches to represent women *before* Edith Wharton's time. Except for Emily Dickinson, of course. She fits the thesis because she did not publish during her lifetime, having been discouraged by a male editor. That he did publish dozens of other women is conveniently ignored.

Within a movement which highlights the achievements of women, why the conspiracy of silence about their literary achievements in the 19th century? I suspect it is because of the myth that male-dominated society has suppressed female creativity, and all those female poets, novelists, and editors from that male-dominated century are too hard to explain.

This particular series of textbooks is governed by a strict quota of half-male and half-female, half-white and half-minority selections, and the result is wildly uneven quality in the selections. In the American literature text, the dominant American classics have to be presented, and there are selections by Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Whitman, Mark Twain, etc., all male. But in order to get the quota right, the students are led to believe that white males stopped writing literature after World War II. . . .

RICHARD A. DAVIS
Columbus, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Michael Levin's anti-feminist diatribe is so full of unwarranted assumptions, misstatements, and grudges that it is impossible to note all of them. A few selected observations follow:

1. Textbooks do reflect reality when they imply that women work (yes, as accountants), that men mother, and that families are not abnormal if they do not have two parents.

2. Feminists do not deride motherhood.

3. The passive voice is not necessarily "awkward," and it may be appropriate and elegant.

4. Feminists don't "want to play by their own rules and yet win the game," as Mr. Levin says, they want some of the rules changed. Even the NFL recognizes the need for reform.

5. The theme of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is not the authors' "dissatisfaction with male lovemaking"—to say so is trivial and reductive.

6. Courses in Women's Studies are not "easy" relative to other college courses (has Mr. Levin read Virginia Woolf and Engels lately?).

7. Women's Studies advocates are not confused; they want women to study all fields of knowledge and they also want a reappraisal of the subject matter of traditional fields, where appropriate. Courses in women's history serve as means to these not incompatible ends.

8. Children certainly do "learn two things at once" without stress, and whether we like it or not, they absorb implicit messages about gender, identity, and values even as they read for other information.

To curriculum design, Mr. Levin evidently prefers the "free-market system," in which not educators and publishers but advertisers and investors determine the portrayal of sex roles and stereotypes for us. When marketing researchers discover a new market—the professional woman and the househusband, for example—they readily enough devise new images by which to manipulate it. Surely educators should have a comparable freedom to shape our consciousness.

Many teachers, and not only ideologues, believe that education "manipulates," not in the sense of brainwashing but of influencing. Education changes people. If this seems subversive, it is hardly new; Socrates was an early radical pedagogue. Mr. Levin's vague faith that "authors [can] be judged on purely educational grounds," if it is not bad faith, is naive. Would he have us abdicate responsibility for selecting the values and ideas that we teach? While transmitting facts (for instance, that men nurse and women work in factories), we should encourage self-reliance and "sensitivity" in children of *both* sexes. Instead of becoming "neuters," they might gain more freedom to make better informed choices about how to live together. Mr. Levin defends his flanks manfully against an Orwellian Big Sister feminist conspiracy, a straw woman, really; but his maneuvers only confirm that sexism is a sign not so much of thought control as of the absence of thinking.

VICTORIA MIDDLETON
Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . I will not gainsay Michael Levin's quotes (albeit out of context) from the various guidelines. I do, however, object to his tone of ridicule and his apparent dismissal of the need to redress an imbalance which has limited the horizons and options of women throughout history. Textbooks have been shown to convey images and ideas which influence the thought and behavior of students. What they omit, as has been made clear in studies of the treatment of Jews in texts and curricula conducted by the American Jewish Committee, has an equally profound effect on student perceptions. When Macmillan urges that "women and girls should be shown as having the same abilities, interests, and ambitions as men," it is an attempt to include a graphic presentation of options for women and girls which have hitherto been closed to them. As one who has been involved in efforts to eliminate Jewish stereotypes (many of which may be shown to have "some truth") from textbooks, I cannot understand Mr. Levin's objection to Silver Burdett's attempt to eliminate, or at least mitigate, sexual stereotypes. Furthermore, I am not sure that, as stated in the article, "any pediatrician will testify that girls are usually more orderly than boys" (no age indicated), but I am acquainted with many college housemothers and camp directors who will testify to the opposite proposition.

Mr. Levin's concern that the image of women projected in books adhering to the new guidelines does not reflect reality is unwarranted and unfair. Since women have not been shown in any but traditional roles in the past, their portrayal in new roles can be an effective means of confronting the social change which is indeed part of today's reality. I would hope that the guidelines' declared position against patronizing the traditional role of women might be implemented more effectively than indicated by Mr. Levin's critique. However, in view of the vast number of textbooks and stories that are still available (and still being read) which illustrate what has been regarded as traditional roles for women, the current introduction of other options in stories and texts is only a beginning. Surely, no male self-image will be tarnished by reading about the creative energy of Christina Katerina; little girls, on the other hand, who—because of past sins of liter-

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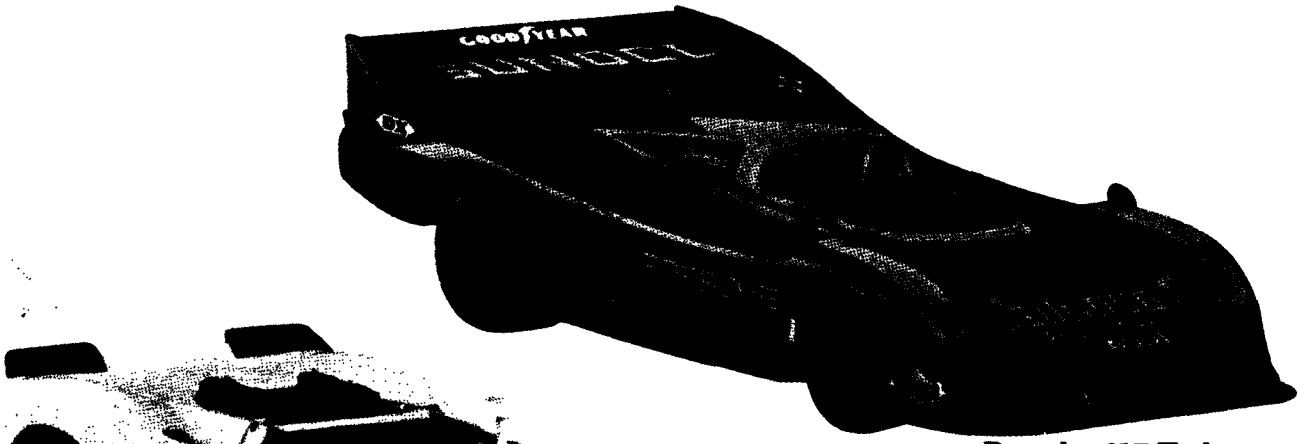

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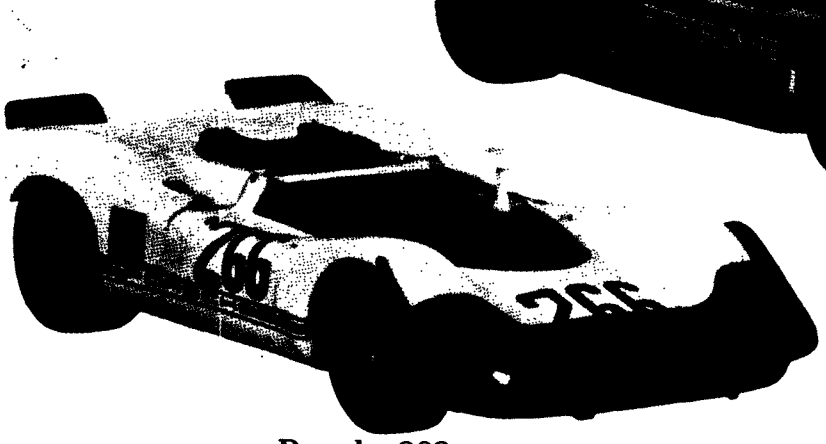

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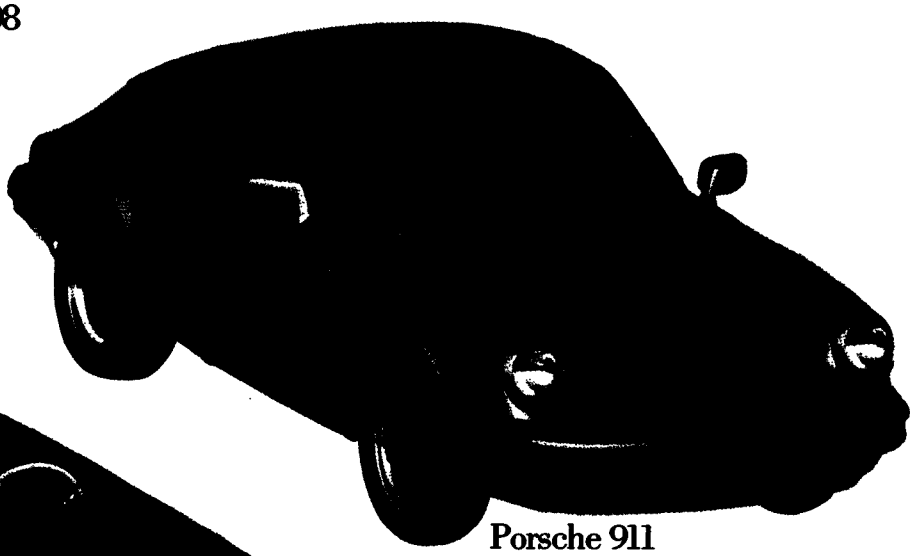

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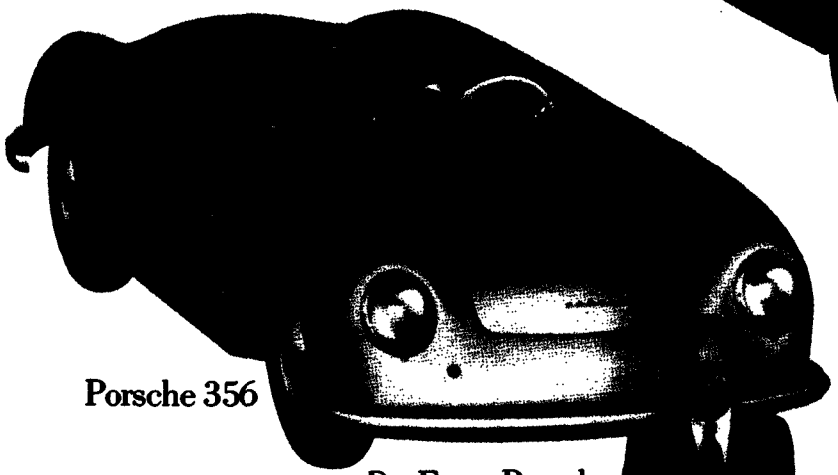

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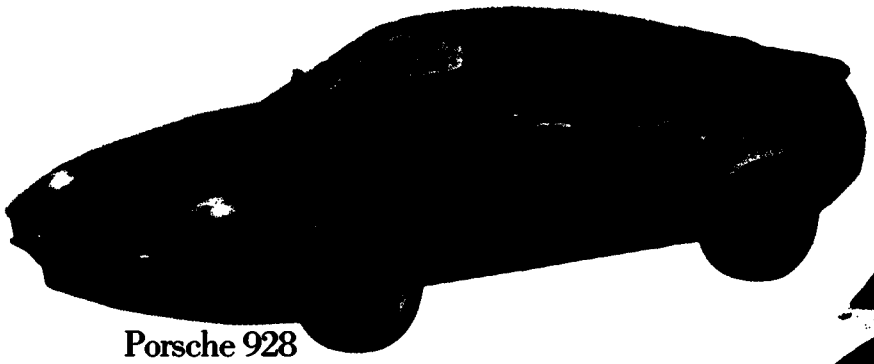

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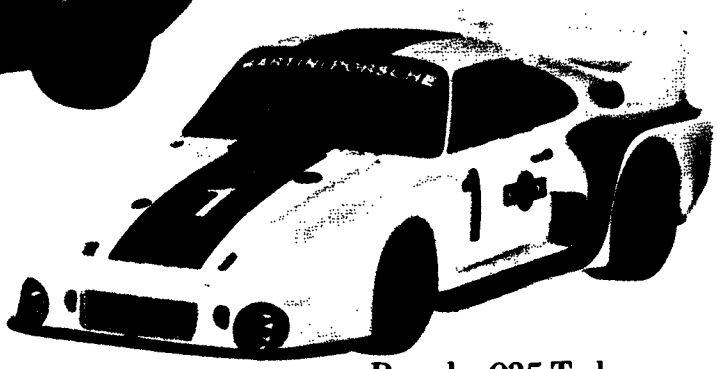

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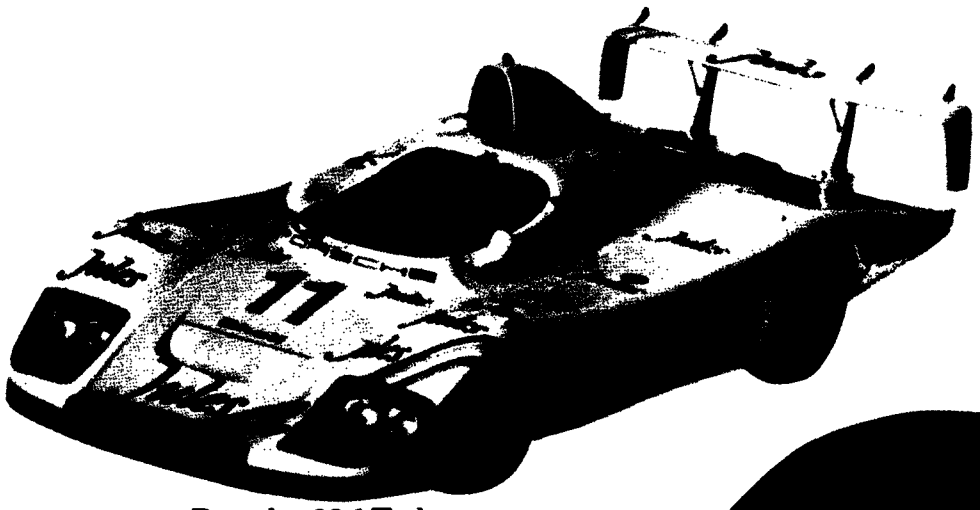

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Dr. F. Porsche
Stuttgart

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ary omission—may never have been aware of such a female paradigm might indeed be limited by the lack of a role model.

As for "the gap between how boys and girls actually behave in the real world and the way they behave in these books," that gap is narrowing as women widen their horizons. In any case, I doubt that the gap would upset this generation any more than its parents were disturbed by the gap between the idealized family of "Dick and Jane" and the families *they* knew.

I am aware of some of the excesses which are the inevitable result of trying to raise consciousness and achieve equal treatment and a more balanced picture of women in today's society. However, using ridicule and reducing a basically serious effort to cope with a changing society to theater of the absurd does a disservice to the publishers who developed the guidelines and the authors who use them. Surely the success of the women's movement in this area should not be denigrated, especially since, as the author points out, "the long-term effects of feminist ideology in education are yet to be measured." I believe when the accounts are all in, the net effect will be an enrichment of human relations through a fuller use of human potential, female and male.

GLADYS ROSEN
Academy for Jewish Studies
Without Walls
American Jewish Committee
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I am not an active feminist, yet I read Michael Levin's article with a growing irritation and sense of female chauvinism. To rid textbooks and curricula of sexism is no more dangerous a thought-control campaign than was the effort of the Catholic church to rid its books and liturgy of anti-Semitism. Both are examples of institutions trying to undo erroneous and harmful messages. . . .

No, Mr. Levin, I never doubted that "he who hesitates" could refer to me; but at the same time I know that the masculine "he" became the generic because males were in the mainstream, and females were not. Those using the generic were men talking to men, because women weren't expected to say anything important. It's about time that we attempted to erase this implied message, and there's nothing inherently awkward about saying "one who hesitates," just as there is nothing awkward in the use of the passive voice. In addition, since Mr. Levin prefers the exact use of words, there is no more obvious place than a logic book, where exactness is not just preferred but imperative, for "all men" to be changed to "all humans" who are mortal.

If indeed the publishing companies have gone too far in expurgating their books of sexism, Mr. Levin does not prove it with the above examples. I for one am sorry that the publishers did not go even farther. I would have had them invent a new pronoun for the third person singular that is both masculine and feminine. Mr. Levin would cringe at the newness of the sound. Does he truly not understand that most of that which sounds awkward *to him is merely* that to which his ear is not accustomed? Does the word "chairperson" sound as awkward today as it did seven or eight years ago? Only to those whose experience is extremely limited or whose resistance to change is extremely strong.

DOROTHY DUBIN
New York City

MICHAEL LEVIN writes:

To Richard A. Davis: I didn't tell a quarter of it. Massachusetts, Iowa, California, and other states all mandate "bias-free" education in their school systems, including the elimination of "stereotypic language patterns" in the classroom itself. This is nothing less than total war against the human past.

To Victoria Middleton: I'm sorry, many (most?) feminists *are* hostile to motherhood (and perhaps frightened by it), and the guidelines reflect this. I'm sorry, there are no child psychologists who think that being raised without two loving parents is a good idea—indeed, when they are not marching toward a glorious future of flex-time and day-care centers, feminists often whine about the stress suffered by female-headed families and implore the government to do some-

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thing about it. And I am most sorry that Women's Studies are easy and worthless. I cherish a copy of a Women's Studies final from a local campus which consists of the question, "What did you get out of this course?" The Women's Studies program at the University of Indiana invites students to write papers on "your own attitude toward menstruation." Big Sister is here, as anyone can verify who is willing to wade through the feminist propaganda about education and virtually every other human activity that pours out of the Departments of Education, Human Services, Labor, and Justice.

To Gladys Rosen: Like Miss Middleton, you are concerned that girls break free of their "traditional roles" to "use their full potential" under the guidance of non-traditional "role models" and so on and so on. This sounds so lame, I suppose, because it isn't easy to work up enthusiasm for censorship. I'm sure you think feminist propaganda is a good thing—censors generally think that what *they* are after is sufficiently important to override free expression—but the rest of us will need something better. Especially since this talk of "role models" belongs to the category of made-up facts; we have only the fantasy that inside every little girl is a feminist, or at least an Amelia Earhart, ready to break out. I should note Macmillan's special recommendation that authors show Jews being athletic. Quite apart from questions of veracity, how is this to be done—pictures of boys with sidelocks and skullcaps running in the backfield?

To Dorothy Dubin: I should like to know what evidence there is that conventional textbooks are erroneous, and even harmful. It is a great confidence trick of the age that feminists can portray all womankind as somehow crippled, and yet never be pressed for any hard evidence that this is so. Speaking of evidence, how do you *know* that "those using the generic were men talking to men, because women weren't expected to say anything important"? Are you privy to what went on in the minds of our cave-person forebears? Really, feminists seem to take television as some sort of paradigm of reality, confusing reality with its representations.

Let me make one final observation. Libertarians have long worried that lodging education in the hands of the state—the force monopoly—would invite the state to indoctrinate its young captive audience. In the past I have thought these fears overdrawn—in part because I am a product of the New York City public-school system, which in the 40's and 50's gave me the best education anyone could hope to receive. But it now seems that feminism is the ideology which has realized libertarian fears. The feminists are using the power of the state to compel the attention of children. This could not have happened had public schools not existed. What remains unclear to me is whether feminist thought control is an aberration, or whether some sort of thought control is the inevitable consequence of state control of education.

Evangelism

To the Editor of Commentary:

Thank you for publishing Gerald S. Strober's fascinating and courageous article, "My Life as a Christian" [June]. His story reminds me of a similar one, written about sixty years ago by Samuel Freuder, under the title "My Return to Judaism." Nowadays, though (after the Holocaust), as Mr. Strober points out, it is even less possible for any self-respecting "messianic Jew" . . . to continue in the belief that faith in Jesus would have prevented the suffering of the Jewish people.

I wonder how Mr. Strober's many Christian friends, above all Billy Graham, felt and feel now about his return to Judaism. It would be interesting to know, too, whether or not his Jewish upbringing made it easier for him to convert to Christianity. Apparently, he came from a very liberal Jewish background, with hardly any knowledge of Judaism. By contrast, most of the leaders of the Jews for Jesus movement have come from strictly Orthodox Jewish families.

At the end of his beautiful article, Mr. Strober hints that some day he will tell the longer story of his

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return to Judaism. . . . We look forward to a book about his whole story in the near future.

HEINZ HARTMANN
Syracuse, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The article by Gerald S. Strober raises important matters both for confessing Christians and for those on the outside looking in at this phenomenon which has been so much in the public eye of late. . . .

Mr. Strober notes that the Christianity with which he was associated for some nineteen years had a tendency to be so overly concerned with the spiritual well-being of people that it was essentially deaf to their deeper human needs. Distribution of literature and biblical harangue too often took priority over listening to the fears and hopes of people from whom those would-be evangelists had much to learn. Alas, it is true that among us evangelical Christians are those who, being so convinced of having every answer to every man's need in one "canned" presentation, are too quick to babble on and too slow to listen with empathy to the hurts, sorrows, or dampened dreams of those to whom they would bear witness. . . .

Further, Mr. Strober points out a particular weakness of the "dispensational" approach to understanding the Bible, namely, that it tends to promote a "proof-text" approach to matters of (from the Christian perspective) grave significance for men and women. Oversimplification and theological shallowness are no substitute for the hard work of wrestling with the problems of men and society in the light of consistent, systematic study of the Scriptures. The approach to the Bible represented by the Scofield Reference Bible is not yet even two hundred years old and is considered by large numbers of evangelicals not to be a reliable means of interpreting the Scriptures. Regrettably, however, because of the high visibility of certain fundamentalist personalities, it is the approach most often set up as a "straw man" for non-Christian critics. Mr. Strober is to be commended for his rejection of this hermeneutic as being altogether unsuitable for the task of making the Bible relevant to the lives of men and women today.

However, Mr. Strober's "baby-with-the-bathwater" approach to Christianity might be confusing to some readers. He gives the impression that, because the Moody Bible Institute approach is unsatisfactory for making Christianity meaningful in our day, then Christianity itself is unsatisfactory and can (and, presumably, should) be abandoned. Two comments are in order here.

The first we have already broached: even among evangelical Christians there are many who have sought to point out the utter inadequacy of contemporary dispensationalism for providing a hermeneutic which can make the riches of biblical truth available for addressing the problems of the modern world. One need not assume, therefore, that the Moody Bible Institute approach is either the only or even the best expression of Christianity today.

Second, Mr. Strober gives the impression that Christianity is a religion without ontological effects upon its adherents. That is, from Mr. Strober's perspective, Christianity, like every other religion in the world, is little else than a system of beliefs which one may take or leave according to his need or stage in life. The teaching of the New Testament, however, is altogether different. . . . Christianity is an irrevocable and undeniable truth for one who has *truly* come to experience it.

Granted there are many, such as Mr. Strober, who, having tasted of Christian faith, become disillusioned and abandon it later on. What can we conclude concerning these? We must let the New Testament speak for itself on such matters. In his first epistle the Apostle John describes a number of individuals who despite their former adherence to the beliefs of the Christian faith had nevertheless now departed from it, no longer numbering themselves among the believers. Concerning these he says, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us" (I John 2.19).

Thus, if only for clarity's sake, perhaps Mr. Strober's article should have been entitled "My Life among the Christians" rather than "My Life as a Christian."

T.M. MOORE
Evangelism Explosion III
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

GERALD S. STROBER writes:

I should like to thank Heinz Hartmann for his kind words. I do hope to write at greater length about my return to the Jewish community.

What can I say to T.M. Moore, who decries the proof-text method and then employs one single New Testament verse to buttress his argument that I never "*truly*" experienced Christian faith? I can also do without Mr. Moore's commendation for my rejecting dispensationalism "as being altogether unsuitable for the task of making the Bible relevant to the lives of men and women today." The fact is these are his words and not mine. I suggested that dispensationalist theory, or for that matter any other Christian hermeneutic, cannot satisfy a Jew who has discovered his heritage and origins. Mr. Moore's argument with dispensationalism for not making the Bible relevant in the contemporary world could be challenged by the many fundamentalist individuals and organizations deeply concerned with the whole man and the whole society. I appreciate Mr. Moore's interest in my article; I just wish he would leave me out of his squabbles with fellow Christians.

The Press & Vietnam

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article, "With the American Press in Vietnam" [May], H. J. Kaplan appears to attribute to Talleyrand a well-known definition of a diplomat that is more accurately to be attributed to Sir Henry Wotton (*Reliquiae Wottonianae*): "An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the commonwealth."

Since this historic remark is often misquoted, as well as wrongly attributed, it can do no harm, I trust, to insist upon the correct source and version.

FRANK HERCULES
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

H. J. Kaplan is lenient in his criticism of David Halberstam, whose unreliability has long been obvious. In the "Author's Note" at the end of his book, *The Best and the Brightest*, Halberstam wrote: "Instead of believing that there was a right way of handling our involvement in Vietnam, in the fall of 1963 I came to the conclusion that it was doomed and that we were on the wrong side of history." But in the concluding chapter of his book, *The Making of a Quagmire* (published in 1965), Halberstam described Vietnam as "a strategic country in a key area . . . perhaps one of only five or six nations in the world that is truly

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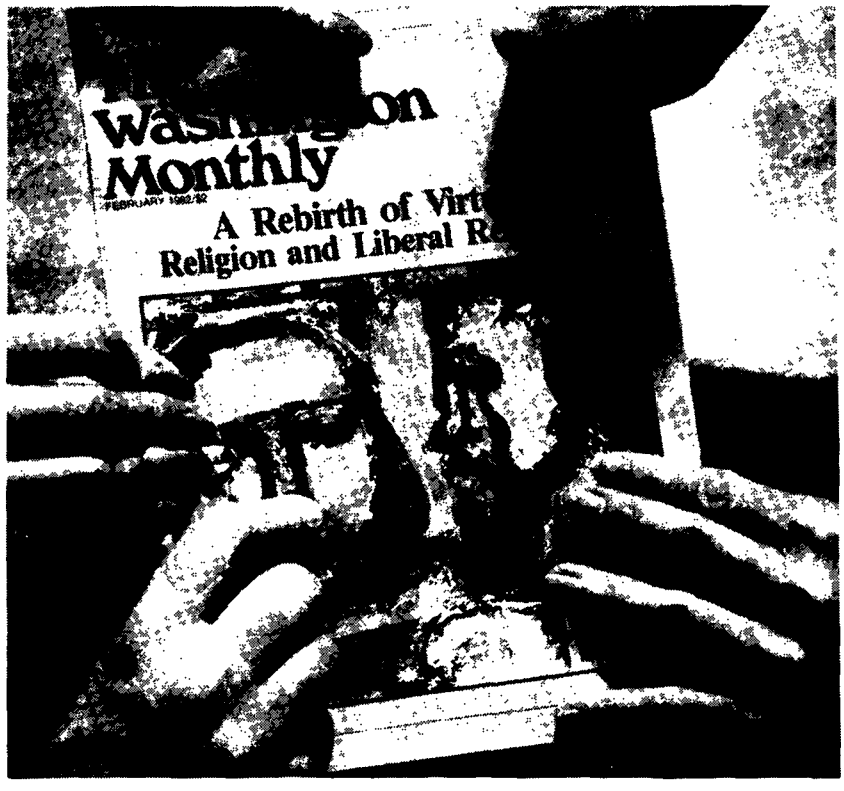

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vital to U.S. interests." In a list of his objections to abandoning South Vietnam, he included the warning: "Withdrawal means that throughout the world the enemies of the West will be encouraged to try insurgencies. . . ." On the other hand, he argued, "an anti-Communist victory in Vietnam would serve to discourage so-called wars of liberation."

Halberstam's subsequent misrepresentation of the views he was championing in the mid-1960's impairs (or ought to impair) his credibility as a reporter.

It should also be noted that in 1963 Halberstam's anti-Diem version of Vietnamese developments was challenged in the New York *Herald Tribune* by a much more experienced journalist, the late Marguerite Higgins. In a series of articles that appeared during late August and early September, two months before Diem's overthrow and murder, Miss Higgins drew attention to the danger that the fall of Diem might cause a serious setback in the war. She made it clear that Diem's opponents lacked the unity to provide an effective alternative government.

Shortly before her death Miss Higgins returned to the issue at greater length in her book, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (1965), in which she criticized the tendency of some of her colleagues to emphasize the defects of friends like Diem while indulging in "romanticism" about revolutionary enemies. In his *All the News That Fits* (1969), a work attacking liberal bias in the New York *Times*, Herman H. Dinsmore praised Miss Higgins as "the most perceptive journalistic observer that America has sent to Vietnam . . . so brilliant she outshone every writer around her." Certainly she was exceptional in her realism about the folly of trying to impose American concepts of "reform" on Third World allies.

Mr. Kaplan's article makes many valid points, especially about the Tet offensive and the enemy's sanctuaries, but fairness to the American press requires that Miss Higgins's writings be taken into account along with those of Halberstam and his ilk.

KENNETH H. W. HILBORN
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I had just finished the first volume of Peter Braestrup's *Big Story* when the May issue of COMMENTARY arrived. I was struck by the way in which H. J. Kaplan's "With the American Press in Vietnam" and the Braestrup book supplement, complement, and support one another. . . .

American media people are apparently the same wherever they happen to be. With minor deviations, the Braestrup-Kaplan critique applies to the Middle East-Israel situation as well. American reporters and columnists are almost to a man without the languages and without any special training for the locality; they shun anything of complexity and reduce all to the simplest terms; they avoid contact with any sources that might raise doubts and questions in their own minds. Any interest in furthering their own education seems entirely lacking in these journalists. As in Vietnam, the coverage supplied by the media people is shallow, skewed, and often inaccurate.

BERNARD COHEN
Jerusalem, Israel

H. J. KAPLAN writes:

I am grateful to my learned friend Frank Hercules for restoring to Sir Henry Wotton an honor of which I was unaware of having deprived him. This adds antiquity to the aphorism as well as a pun that would not be possible in French.

I also appreciate Bernard Cohen's letter and Kenneth H. W. Hilborn's reminder that a number of excellent journalists, like Marguerite Higgins, refused to allow themselves to be stampeded by the anti-Diem herd. It was the latter, unfortunately, who won out, and then went on to fashion the conventional (media) view of the war.

"Missing"

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Richard Grenier's review of *Missing* is, as usual, superb ["The Curious Case of Costa-Gavras," April]. But writing, not mathematics, is clearly his forte. The incorrect specification of Chilean infant mortality as x *percent* per thousand yields a tenfold magnification, e.g., 790 instead of 79 per thousand births. Perhaps the Chileans, together with their problems, will, like old soldiers, simply fade away.

RICHARD D. WILKINS
Syracuse, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Richard Grenier's comments about Joy Gould Boyum's review of the film *Missing* in the *Wall Street Journal* are at least revealing, if not much more. Apparently he feels that the political and economic beliefs held by the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* should determine Miss Boyum's reactions to particular films. Since Mr. Grenier is the regular movie critic for your magazine, and since COMMENTARY definitely holds a point of view, I suppose we must believe that he practices what he preaches (and preaches and preaches and preaches) and reviews films with editorial policy in mind.

Of course Hitler demanded that art have clarity. Artists and critics who did not share his view of clarity did not do very well. Russia and Red China have demanded socialist realism, and we know what that produced. I suppose we can console ourselves with the thought that Hitler and the Communist art commissars were totalitarian, while Mr. Grenier represents merely an authoritarian stance.

Still, who would have thought that the reviewer for the *Wall Street Journal* could dare give a favorable notice to, of all things, a Commie film. She is probably a—gasp—feminist, too.

A. DAMIEN MARTIN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Neither Costa-Gavras nor his films are above criticism, but some of the statements in Richard Grenier's polemic are literally incredible and demand comment.

The Church Committee did not rule out the possibility of CIA involvement in the coup in Chile entirely—it only stated that it could find no evidence of it. The CIA's role in destabilizing the Chilean economy prior to the coup is now a matter of public record, as is the U.S. government's unqualified support for the Chilean junta after the coup. In this context, and after a now documented performance by the CIA in Guatemala in 1954 under nearly identical circumstances, how can we believe that the CIA had no possible role in the coup in Chile?

Mr. Grenier produces no evidence, despite his implications, that *The Confession* is anything other than a sincere attack on Stalinism. This courageous film remains the only distinguished anti-Stalinist film from any source. It received far less ac-

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claim than *Z*, and, unlike *Z*, was a box-office failure.

Are the CIA's activities, and American policy in Latin America, to be exempt from serious criticism? If not, what serious criticism is acceptable to Mr. Grenier? . . .

NEIL COPERTINI
Santa Barbara, California

RICHARD GRENIER writes:

I thank Richard D. Wilkins for his compliment and regret the slip.

As for A. Damien Martin and Neil Copertini, a minor inconvenience for authors is that they must sometimes answer letters that are obtuse. My criticism of Joy Gould Boyum's review of *Missing* was not that she had departed from the editorial views of the *Wall Street Journal* but that she was ignorant, as is A. Damien Martin. It is a quality I do not much enjoy in anyone and I do not expect to find it in a contributor to a responsible newspaper. I also do not think A. Damien Martin—who seems to have me confused with General Galtieri—has much common sense. If he thinks a Communist sympathizer would be an impartial judge of recent events in Chile, there is nothing I can do for him.

Mr. Copertini compounds the problem by attributing to me views I do not hold. I did not say that the CIA "had no possible role in the coup in Chile." I, frankly, have no way of knowing whether the CIA played a role or not (holding, in this, with the Church Committee). I am simply not prepared to take Costa-Gavras's word that it did, particularly when he asserts this in a movie which begins: "This film is based on a true story. The incidents and facts are documented." They are *not* documented. Costa-Gavras plays fast and loose with the facts throughout, and to establish the film's main theses we have nothing but his "artistic" intuition. Concerning Costa-Gavras's *The Confession*, I, again, did not imply that it wasn't "a sincere attack on Stalinism." I merely pointed out that it was a sincere attack on Stalinism from the point of view of a Communist reformer, someone who thought Stalinism was a mere aberration and that a better, more beautiful world was still possible under an improved form of Communism. If Mr. Copertini cannot get his mind around this, I don't think he would benefit much from a lecture from me on the function of criticism in a democratic society.

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J'Accuse

Norman Podhoretz

THE war in Lebanon triggered an explosion of invective against Israel that in its fury and its reach was unprecedented in the public discourse of this country. In the past, unambiguously venomous attacks on Israel had been confined to marginal sectors of American political culture like the *Village Voice* and the *Nation* on the far Left and their counterparts in such publications of the far Right as the Liberty Lobby's *Spotlight*. Even when, as began happening with greater and greater frequency after the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel was attacked in more respectable quarters, care was often taken to mute the language or modulate the tone. Usually the attack would be delivered more in sorrow than in anger, and it would be accompanied by sweet protestations of sympathy. The writer would claim to be telling the Israelis harsh truths for their own good as a real friend should, on the evident assumption that he had a better idea than they did of how to insure their security, and even survival. In perhaps the most notable such piece, George W. Ball (of whom more later) explained to the readers of *Foreign Affairs* "How to Save Israel in Spite of Herself." No matter that Ball warned the Israelis that unless they adopted policies they themselves considered too dangerous, he for one would recommend the adoption of other policies by the United States that would leave them naked unto their enemies; no matter that he thereby gave the Israelis a choice, as they saw it, between committing suicide and being murdered: he still represented himself as their loyal friend.

And so it was with a host of other commentators, including prominent columnists like Anthony Lewis of the New York *Times*, academic pundits like Stanley Hoffmann of Harvard, and former diplomatic functionaries like Harold Saunders. To others it might seem that their persistent hectoring of Israel was making a considerable contribution to the undermining of Israel's case for American support and thereby endangering Israel's very existence. Nevertheless they would have all the world know that they yielded to no one in their commitment to the survival of Israel. Indeed, it was they, and not Israel's "uncritical" supporters, who were Israel's best friends in this country. As a matter of fact, they were even better friends to Israel than most Israelis themselves who, alas, were their "own worst enemies" (an idea which recently prompted Conor Cruise O'Brien, the former editor of the London *Observer*, to remark: "Well, I suppose Israelis may be their own worst enemies, but if they are, they have had to overcome some pretty stiff competition for that coveted title").

This kind of thing by no means disappeared from the public prints with the Israeli move into Lebanon. In the thick file of clippings I have before me there are many expressions of "anguish" and "sadness" over the damage Israel was doing to its "image" and to its "good name." In a fairly typical effusion, Alfred Friendly wrote in the Washington *Post* (of which he was formerly the managing editor):

> Perhaps it was expecting more than was possible —that Israel should remain the country with a conscience, a home for honor, a treasury for the values of mind and soul. At any rate, it is so no longer but merely a nation like any other, its unique splendor lost . . . its slaughters are on a par with . . . Trujillo's Dominican Republic or Papa Doc's Haiti. Still absent are the jackboots, the shoulder boards, and the bemedalled chests, but one can see them, figuratively, on the minister of defense. No doubt Israel is still an interesting country. But not for the reasons, the happy reasons, that made it such for me.

In addition to lamenting Israel's loss of moral stature as a result of Lebanon, these great friends of Israel condemned the resort to "unselective and disproportionate violence" (Anthony Lewis) on the ground that it "cannot serve the spirit of Israel, or its true security."

But the sympathetic protestations of this particular species of friend—including even Lewis, perhaps the most unctuous of them all—became more perfunctory and more mechanical in the weeks after the war began. One got the feeling that they were offered mainly for the record or to fend off criticism. And in any case, the preponderant emphasis was no longer on the putative damage Israel was doing to itself by its wicked or

NORMAN PODHORETZ is the editor of COMMENTARY and the author of five books, the latest of which is *Why We Were in Vietnam*. Among his contributions to these pages is "The Abandonment of Israel" (July 1976).

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stupid policies. The focus was now unmistakably on the evils Israel was committing against others, as in this passage from a column by Richard Cohen in the Washington *Post*:

> Maybe the ultimate tragedy of the seemingly nonstop war in the Middle East is that Israel has adopted the morality of its hostile neighbors. Now it bombs cities, killing combatants and noncombatants alike—men as well as women, women as well as children, Palestinians as well as Lebanese.

Israel's "true friends," then, were liberated by Lebanon to say much more straightforwardly and in more intemperate terms than before what they had all along felt: that Israeli intransigence and/or aggressiveness and/or expansionism are the main (and for some, the only) source of the Arab-Israeli conflict and therefore the main (or only) obstacle to a peaceful resolution of that conflict.

EVEN if this were all, it would have increased the volume and intensity of the attacks on Israel to an unprecedented level. But what made matters much worse was the proportionate escalation and increasing respectability of the attacks from quarters that had never pretended to friendly concern with Israel.

To be sure, apologists for the PLO who had always been ugly about Israel—Edward Said, Alexander Cockburn, and Nicholas von Hoffman, to mention three prominent names—had been getting a more and more deferential hearing in recent years. Books by Said like *The Question of Palestine* had been widely and sympathetically reviewed in the very media he indiscriminately denounces for being anti-Arab; Cockburn, whose weekly pieces in the *Village Voice* have set a new standard of gutter journalism in this country (and not merely in dealing with Israel), has been rewarded with regular columns in *Harper's* and the *Wall Street Journal* (where in exchange for access to a respectable middle-class audience he watches his literary manners); and von Hoffman, who is only slightly less scurrilous than Cockburn, has also found a hospitable welcome in *Harper's* and a host of other mainstream periodicals both here and abroad (not to mention the television networks). Writing to a British audience in the London *Spectator* (for which he does a regular column), von Hoffman exulted openly in this change:

> Where before it was difficult to print or say something that was critical of Israeli policies and practices, the barriers are now coming down. Some writers used to believe—rightly or wrongly—that to expound a Palestinian point of view was to risk blacklisting. Now many have become emboldened. . . .

But if they were becoming "emboldened" before Lebanon, their tongues now lost all restraint. Von Hoffman himself is a case in point, having been emboldened in another piece in the *Spectator* to compare Lebanon to Lidice and the Israelis to the Nazis: "Incident by incident, atrocity by atrocity, Americans are coming to see the Israel government as pounding the Star of David into a swastika."

Whether von Hoffman published these words in the United States, I do not know, but by his own account he could easily have found an outlet. "Where once, among the daily press, only the Boston *Globe* could be counted on to print other points of view as a matter of consistent policy . . . now other voices are becoming somewhat more audible."

Somewhat? According to one estimate, of the first 19 pieces on the war in Lebanon to appear on the New York *Times* Op-Ed page, 17 were hostile to Israel and only two (one of them by me) were sympathetic. I have not made a statistical survey of the Washington *Post* Op-Ed page, but my impression is that the balance there was roughly the same. In short, not only did the kind of virulent pieces formerly confined to the *Village Voice* and other yellow journals of the Left and Right increase in number and intensity; such pieces now also began appearing regularly in reputable papers and magazines.

Thus no sooner had the Israelis set foot in Lebanon than Edward Said was to be found on the Op-Ed page of the New York *Times* declaring that Sidon and Tyre had been "laid waste, their civilian inhabitants killed or made destitute by Israeli carpet bombing," and accusing Israel of pursuing "an apocalyptic logic of exterminism." The comparison of Israel with the Nazis here was less brazen than in von Hoffman's piece, but William Pfaff more than made up for it in the *International Herald Tribune*: "Hitler's work goes on," he began, and concluded with the prediction that Hitler might soon "find rest in Hell" through "the knowledge that the Jews themselves, in Israel, have finally . . . accepted his own way of looking at things." The famous spy novelist John le Carré was imported from England by the Boston *Globe* to deliver himself of similar sentiments:

> Too many Israelis, in their claustrophobia, have persuaded themselves that every Palestinian man and woman and child is by definition a military target, and that Israel will not be safe until the pack of them are swept away. It is the most savage irony that Begin and his generals cannot see how close they are to inflicting upon another people the disgraceful criteria once inflicted upon themselves.

Finally, the syndicated cartoonist Oliphant, like Cockburn in the *Wall Street Journal*, portrayed besieged west Beirut as another Warsaw ghetto, with the PLO in the role of the Jews and the Israelis in the role of the Nazis.

Many other writers were also "emboldened" by Lebanon, but not quite enough to compare the

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Israelis with the Nazis. Alfred Friendly, in the passage quoted above, only compared them to Trujillo and Duvalier. Hodding Carter, in the *Wall Street Journal*, invoked Sparta (though his use of language like "Several Lebanese towns have been pulverized by the tactics of total war [and] tens of thousands of Lebanese have been killed or injured since the blitzkrieg was launched" suggested that Sparta was not really the state he had in mind). And Joseph C. Harsch, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, brought up Communist Vietnam: "Vietnam is imperial. It dominate[s] its neighbors Laos and Cambodia. In that same sense Israel is now the dominant power in its own area." Extending this ingenious comparison, Harsch wrote:

> Israel's major weapons come from the U.S. Israel's economy is sustained by subsidies from the U.S. . . . It depends on Washington, just as Vietnam depends for major arms and for economic survival on Moscow. Neither Israel nor Vietnam could dominate their neighborhoods if the support of their major patrons were withdrawn.

But the prize for the most startling comparison of all goes to Mary McGrory of the Washington *Post*, who was reminded of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More startling still, Miss McGrory said that in her opinion what the Israelis were doing in Lebanon was worse. Addressing Begin directly she wrote:

> You were trying to save your own troops. We understand that. We are, after all, the country that dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. . . . But grant us that we were up against a mighty, if weakened, war machine and a totally mobilized nation. You were punishing a wretched country that reluctantly shelters factions, which, while hostile to you, could not wipe you off the face of the earth, however much they might want to.

WHAT are we to make of words and images like these? How are we to explain them? How are we to understand what they portend?

There are well-wishers of Israel, among them a number of Jews, who recoil in horror from the idea that the Israelis are no better than Nazis, but who believe that Israel under Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon has brought all this violent abuse on itself. Even though the degree of condemnation is excessive, say these anxious well-wishers, the Israelis have only themselves to blame for besmirching their "good name." Yet I would suggest that the beginning of wisdom in thinking about this issue is to recognize that the vilification of Israel is the phenomenon to be addressed, and not the Israeli behavior that supposedly provoked it. I say supposedly because when a reaction is as wildly disproportionate to an event as this one was, it is clearly being fed by sources other than the event itself.

But what am I or anyone else to say to those for whom there is nothing obvious about the assertion that in this particular case the reaction was disproportionate? From such people one is tempted to turn away in disgust. Yet difficult as it may be to entertain, even for as long as it takes to refute it, the loathsome idea that Israel is to the Palestinians as the Nazis were to the Jews, the world evidently still needs to be reminded of the differences.

To begin with, then, the Nazis set out to murder every Jew on the face of the earth, and wherever they had the power to do so, they systematically pursued this objective. Is this what the Israelis have tried to do to the Palestinians? If so, they have gone about it in a most peculiar way.

In Germany under the Nazis, the Jews were first stripped of their civil and political rights and then sent to concentration camps where virtually all of them were put to death. For more than thirty-five years, by contrast, Palestinian Arabs living in the state of Israel have enjoyed Israeli citizenship and along with it a degree of civil and political liberty, not to mention prosperity, unknown to Arabs living in any country under Arab sovereignty.

For fifteen years, moreover, about a million Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza have been in the power of Israel under military occupation. Have squads of gunmen been dispatched to shoot them down in the fashion of the *Einsatzgruppen* who murdered an approximately equal number of Jews in those parts of the Soviet Union occupied by the Nazis? Have the West Bank Palestinians been rounded up and deported to concentration camps in preparation for being gassed, as happened to some three million Jews living in other countries occupied by Nazi Germany? The Nazis in less than six years managed to kill more than five million Jews in occupied territory. How many Palestinian Arabs have been killed by the Israelis in fifteen years? A hundred? And if even that many, has a single civilian been killed as a matter of policy? Again, the fact is that the Palestinians living even under Israeli military occupation, and even since the recent political offensive against PLO influence on the West Bank, have enjoyed a greater degree of civil and political liberty than any of their brother Arabs living anywhere else *except* in Israel as Israeli citizens.

It is or ought to be obvious, then, that any comparison between the way Israel has treated the Palestinians and the way the Nazis dealt with the Jews is from a rational perspective, let alone morally, disproportionate to a monstrous degree. Anyone who makes such a comparison cannot possibly be responding to the facts of the case and must be driven by some other impulse.

But what about the comparisons of Israel with Sparta, or Haiti, or Communist Vietnam? Are they any the less disproportionate? If so, it is only because nothing could match the intellectual and

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moral excess of equating Jews with Nazis. Still, these comparisons are sufficiently outlandish in their own right.

Sparta, to start with the least repellent of them, was a police state so dedicated to war and so single-mindedly devoted to the martial values that any male child deemed unfit to become a soldier was taken to the mountains and abandoned to his death. Israel is a democracy with an army made up largely of civilian reservists to whom nothing is more distasteful than going to war and to whom peace is the highest value. As for Haiti or the Dominican Republic under Trujillo, they have so little in common with Israel in any respect that bringing their names into the discussion can only be seen as an effort to sneak by with the absurd charge that Israel is no longer a democratic country.

Apparently, though, not even this charge was too absurd to surface openly in the public prints. Thus, Douglas S. Crow, Professor of Religion, no less, at Columbia University, wrote in a letter to the New York *Times* of Israel's "posturing as a bastion of democracy." But if Israel, where all citizens, including Arabs, have the right to vote and where all individuals and parties, including the Communists, enjoy a full range of liberties—speech, press, assembly, and so on—is not a bastion of democracy, where shall such a bastion be found?

The same point can be made of the analogy with Communist Vietnam, where there is even greater repression than in Trujillo's Dominican Republic and perhaps even greater economic misery than in Haiti. To compare Israel—which can indeed be described as a bastion of democracy—with what is by all accounts one of the most Stalinist regimes in the entire Communist world, is a sufficiently gross travesty. But is the comparison Joseph C. Harsch makes between the behavior of the two states toward their respective neighbors any more justifiable?

Both, says Mr. Harsch, are "imperial" states using military forces to dominate the countries of the region. That this is an apt characterization of Communist Vietnam very few will nowadays contest. Two years after signing a peace treaty with South Vietnam, the Communist regime of the North invaded and conquered the South. Not content with that, Vietnam proceeded to invade Cambodia where it installed another puppet regime, while keeping some 40,000 troops in Laos to insure its domination over the Communist regime there. Nor could Vietnam claim to be acting defensively: neither South Vietnam nor Cambodia nor Laos posed any threat to Hanoi.

If we now ask what this set of relationships has in common with the relations between Israel and its neighbors, the answer can only be: nothing whatever. One grows weary of reciting the facts of the Arab-Israeli conflict over and over again. But the controversy generated by Lebanon demonstrates that far from being tiresomely familiar, they are still unknown by some and forgotten or deliberately ignored by others for whom they are politically inconvenient.

In 1947, then, the United Nations adopted a partition plan for Palestine, dividing it into a Jewish state and a Palestinian one. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs rejected it. The form this rejection took was a war against the new Jewish state of Israel launched by the armies of five neighboring Arab states, with the aid and encouragement of all the others. Israel successfully fended off this assault and begged its neighbors to make peace with it. But they all refused, rededicating themselves instead to the elimination of any trace of a sovereign Jewish state from the region.

Living in consequence under siege, with a coalition of nineteen nations pledged to its destruction, Israel maneuvered as best it could. In 1956, it joined forces with the British and the French in an attack on Egypt which left the Israelis in control of a stretch of the Sinai desert. But in response to American pressure, all three parties soon withdrew, and Israel in particular returned the Sinai to Egypt (without any *quid pro quo*). So much for the first instance of Israeli "expansionism" or "imperialism" and the only one to which these epithets have so much as a remotely plausible claim.

The next episode occurred in 1967, when Egypt took a series of actions clearly spelling an intention to resort once again to military force whose explicit objective was—as its then leader, Nasser, put it—"the destruction of Israel." After waiting for about two weeks while the United States and others worked unsuccessfully to avert a war in which they might be "wiped off the map" (Nasser's language again) if the Arabs struck the first blow, the Israelis launched a preemptive attack. Six days later, thanks to a brilliant campaign, they found themselves in possession of territory formerly belonging to or occupied by Egypt (the Sinai), Syria (the Golan Heights), and Jordan (the West Bank).

To the Arabs and their apologists, this was another instance of expansionism and imperialism. But since virtually no one doubts that Nasser provoked the 1967 war or believes that there would have been a war at all if not for his closing of the Straits of Tiran (among other actions he took), how can it be regarded as an imperialistic operation by Israel? In any case, Israel begged King Hussein of Jordan to stay out of the war once it started, and if he had agreed, the Israelis would not have been obliged to respond to his attack and they would not have ended the war in control of the West Bank.

Even so, Israel once again, as it had been doing since the day of its birth, asked only for recognition and face-to-face negotiations with its Arab neighbors. Such negotiations would have resulted in the return of occupied territories with whatever minor boundary adjustments security might dictate. Yet once again, as they had from the be-

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ginning, the Arab states refused, responding this time with the famous three No's of Khartoum: No recognition, No negotiation, No peace.

Finally, seven years later and after yet another war—this one unambiguously started by Egypt in a surprise attack—Anwar Sadat (Nasser's successor) called what had been universally regarded in the Arab world as Israel's "bluff" by offering recognition and face-to-face negotiations. Almost overnight, Israel responded by agreeing to return every inch of Egyptian territory and then honored the agreement. So much for imperialism.

Now comes Lebanon. To show that Israel is behaving toward Lebanon as Vietnam has behaved toward Cambodia, Joseph C. Harsch writes:

> Israel has now decreed that there must be no more "foreign" military forces in Lebanon. That means that Israel wants all Palestinian and Syrian armed units out of Lebanon, leaving Lebanon in the hands of elements which would be sympathetic to Israel and to its interests.

There are so many astonishing features in these two sentences that one hardly knows where to begin. In the first place, why the quotation marks around the word foreign? Is Harsch trying to suggest that the "Palestinian and Syrian armed units" are indigenous or native to Lebanon? In the second place, what is illegitimate about Israel's desire to leave Lebanon "in the hands of elements which would be sympathetic to Israel and its interests"? In view of the fact that those "elements" would be the Lebanese people themselves, there can be nothing wrong in leaving Lebanon in their hands; and in view of the fact that before Lebanon was taken over by the PLO and the Syrians it was sufficiently "sympathetic to Israel and its interests" to live peacefully alongside Israel, a more accurate way of putting the case would be to say that Israel hopes to free Lebanon from the domination of foreign forces who have turned an unwilling Lebanon into a battlefield of their war against Israel.

But of course putting it that way would defeat the purpose of portraying Israel as an imperialistic power imposing its will upon a helpless neighbor. And it would also show the falsity of describing the war as an invasion of Lebanon. Yes, the Israelis did invade Lebanon in the sense of sending military forces across the Lebanese border. But if we are looking for analogies, a better one than any fished up in recent weeks would be the invasion of France by allied troops in World War II. The purpose was not to conquer France but to liberate it from its German conquerors, just as the purpose of the Israelis in 1982 was to liberate Lebanon from the PLO.

Harsch and many of his colleagues may not know this, but the Lebanese people do. In spite of the sufferings inflicted upon them by the war, and in spite of the fact that they have no love for Israel, they have greeted the Israelis as liberators. Representative Charles Wilson, a Texas Democrat who is so far from being reflexively pro-Israel that he voted for the AWACS sale and intends to vote for the Jordanian arms sale, testified after a visit to Lebanon in July to

> the universal enthusiasm with which the Lebanese welcomed the Israeli army. . . . I mean it's almost like a liberating army. . . . It was astonishing. I expected this, somewhat, from the Christian population. But I didn't expect it from the Muslim population. . . . And in talking to a group of people, some of whom had lost their homes, some of whom had lost relatives, they said it was awful. But they said that all in all, to be free of the PLO it was worth it.

One can see why. According to a news story by David K. Shipler in the New York *Times*, the PLO, whose "major tool of persuasion was the gun," ruled over a large part of Lebanon, terrifying and terrorizing the local populace, Christian and Muslim alike. It took over land and houses, it confiscated automobiles, it stole at will from the shops, and anyone who complained was likely to be shot. Operating as a state within a state, the PLO humiliated local Lebanese officials and displaced them with its own police and "people's committees."

On top of all this, writes Shipler, the PLO "brought mercenaries in from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and North African countries. By all accounts the outsiders were crude, undisciplined thugs." And then there were the killings. "Before the PLO," one Lebanese woman told Shipler, "we used to be pro-Palestinian. . . . [But] when we saw the Palestinians were killing us and threatening us and having barricades and shooting innocent people, then came the hatred."

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, whose column has always been notorious for its pro-Arab bias, arrived at the same assessment: "Once incorruptible, its extraordinary success in accumulating arms and money . . . had made the PLO itself an occupying power . . . permeated by thugs and adventurers."

If this disposes of the idea that a Vietnam-like Israel was imposing its imperial will upon Lebanon, it does not dispose of the charge that the war in Lebanon was imperialistic in a different sense—that Israel's purpose, as Anthony Lewis (among many others) charges, was "to exterminate Palestinian nationalism" in preparation for annexing the West Bank.

Here again, before taking up the substance, one is forced to begin by pointing to the form in which the charge is expressed. By using the word "exterminate"—a word which is inescapably associated with what the Nazis did to the Jews—Lewis contrives to evoke the comparison while covering himself by designating "Palestinian nationalism"

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rather than the Palestinian people as the victim. But even in this form the charge is an outlandish misrepresentation. For the *maximum* objective of the Begin government is to establish Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank while allowing to the Palestinians living there a degree of control over their own civil and political affairs far greater—once more the point must be stressed—than they have ever enjoyed in the past, or than Arabs enjoy in any country under Arab sovereignty. This is "to exterminate Palestinian nationalism"?

And even this—to repeat, Begin's *maximum* objective—is subject by Begin's own commitment to negotiation. That is, in signing the Camp David agreement, Begin has obligated the state of Israel to settle the question of sovereignty after five years by negotiations among all the interested parties, including the West Bank Palestinians. This means that whether Begin and Sharon like it or not, they or their successors might well find themselves turning over the West Bank to Jordan or to a new Palestinian leadership willing, unlike the PLO, to live in peace both with Israel and Jordan.

It is precisely the hope of encouraging such a leadership to emerge that lies behind the two-sided strategy of destroying the PLO as a military force in Lebanon and as a political force on the West Bank. I urge anyone who doubts this to read "How to Make Peace with the Palestinians" by Menahem Milson.* In that article Milson said that Israeli policy on the West Bank had in the past inadvertently led to the strengthening of the PLO's influence there. He therefore advocated a new policy aimed at weakening the PLO so that the "silenced majority"—which in his judgment wished to live in peace with Israel—could make itself heard. The end result was to be a demand by the Palestinians on the West Bank that King Hussein repudiate the PLO as "the sole representative of the Palestinian people" and resume his old role as their spokesman.

After reading that article, Begin and Sharon appointed Milson (then a professor of Arabic literature at the Hebrew University) to the post of civil administrator of the West Bank, from which position he has been putting the policy outlined in the article into practice. The PLO and its apologists have naturally done everything in their power to sabotage and discredit Milson. But the political war against the PLO was proceeding on the West Bank as the military campaign against the PLO in Lebanon was being launched.

No one can say what the eventual disposition of the West Bank will be. What one can say with complete assurance, however, is that so long as the only alternative to Israeli occupation is a Palestinian state ruled over by radical forces pledged to the destruction of Israel, then no Israeli government—no matter who might be its prime minister—will be permitted by Israeli public opinion to withdraw. But one can also say, though with less assurance, that if an alternative should present itself, then no Israeli government, including one headed by Ariel Sharon, would be permitted by Israeli public opinion to absorb the West Bank.

Israelis have different reasons for wanting to rid themselves of the West Bank. Some fear the effects of continued occupation on the character of Israel as a democratic society; others fear the effects on the character of Israel as a Jewish state of adding so many Arabs to its demographic mix; still others are convinced that continued occupation is a formula for continued war.

But whatever their motives, many or (as I read Israeli public opinion) most Israelis would favor a withdrawal from the West Bank provided they were reasonably confident that the successor regime would be willing to live in peace with a neighboring Jewish state (and provided also, probably, that Jews who wished to go on living in Judea and Samaria would have the same right to do so as Arabs have in Israel). Elimination of the radical rejectionist Palestinians—whether or not they call themselves the PLO—is a precondition for any such resolution of the Palestinian problem. Consequently if Begin and Sharon succeed in their objective of destroying the PLO, they may well make it impossibly difficult for Israel to annex or absorb the West Bank—not because of pressures coming from Washington but because of pressures coming from within Israel itself.

ALL this, however, is for the future. Returning to the present and to the war in Lebanon, we still have to face the charge that Israel was waging a wanton and indiscriminate campaign against defenseless civilians.

In the early days of the war, words like "holocaust" and even "genocide" freely circulated in the media, along with horrendous estimates of the number of civilians killed or rendered homeless by Israeli arms. At first it was said that 10,000 people had been "slaughtered" in southern Lebanon and 600,000 turned into refugees. But no sooner had these figures been imprinted on the public mind than it was revealed that the local Lebanese authorities themselves put the *total* population of the area in question at 510,000—almost 100,000 fewer than were supposedly driven out of their homes. Israel claimed that there were 20,000 refugees and perhaps 2,000 casualties, of whom more than half were only wounded. Correspondents and other visitors to Lebanon soon confirmed that the original figures were "extreme exaggerations" (Shipler), while casting evenhanded doubt on the much lower Israeli figures. Even though "discussions with local officials and residents of the cities tend to reinforce the Israeli estimates of casualties there," wrote Shipler, "the Israeli figures exclude a lot."

Thus arose what came to be called "the numbers

* COMMENTARY, May 1981.

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game." But the damage to Israel had already been done. In any case, what did it matter, asked Mary McGrory, what the exact figures were? Whatever the precise number, "it is already too many." In her open letter to Begin, she asked:

> Does Israel's security have to be purchased by the slaughter of innocents? . . . We have been seeing every night pictures of wounded babies and old men. We read about people standing outside devastated apartment buildings, wearing masks against the stench of corpses, waiting to go in to claim their dead. They were a threat to you? Yes, we know, your planes dropped leaflets before they dropped the bombs. But why did you have to bomb their cities at all? People in apartment buildings may be PLO sympathizers or even devoted adherents of Yasir Arafat. But they were unarmed civilians.

Indeed they were, but Miss McGrory's letter might better have been directed to Arafat than to Begin. For (in Shipler's words):

> The huge sums of money the PLO received from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries seem to have been spent primarily on weapons and ammunition, which were placed strategically in densely populated civilian areas in the hope that this would either deter Israeli attacks or exact a price from Israel in world opinion for killing civilians. Towns and camps were turned into vast armories as crates of ammunition were stacked in underground shelters and antiaircraft guns were emplaced in schoolyards, among apartment houses, next to churches and hospitals. The remains could be seen soon after the fighting, and Palestinians and Lebanese can still point out the sites.

This strategy of hiding behind civilians was entirely natural for the terrorist organization whose greatest exploits in the past invariably involved hijackings and the killing of innocent bystanders. Having held airplanes and buildings hostage, the PLO—as the American Lebanese League declared in a newspaper advertisement—was now holding much of Lebanon itself hostage, and especially west Beirut. Who, the League asked, gave "the PLO authority to insist that Lebanese civilians die with them?" Certainly not the Lebanese civilians themselves.

It is also important to note that under international law (specifically Article 28 of the Geneva Convention of 1948), "the presence of a protected person may not be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations," and the responsibility for civilian casualties or damage rests on the party, in this case the PLO, who thus uses protected persons or areas. What the other side, in this instance Israel, is required to do is exactly the kind of thing Miss McGrory derides in her reference to the dropping of leaflets: that is, warn the civilians so that they have a chance to leave the area or otherwise protect themselves.

While scrupulously observing this requirement, the Israelis also took other steps to minimize civilian casualties, some of which led to an increase in their own casualties. This is why Miss McGrory's citation of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is so bizarre. As it happens, I myself agree with her in thinking that the United States was justified in that action (because the result was to shorten the war and to save many more lives than were lost in the two raids). But the whole point of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to wreak indiscriminate damage which would terrorize the Japanese into surrendering. The Israelis were doing almost exactly the opposite in Lebanon. Their strikes were so careful and discriminating that whole areas of southern Lebanon were left untouched. If they really had been carpet bombing, both the levels of destruction and the number of casualties would have been far greater.

That a left-wing liberal like Mary McGrory should be driven into comparing Israel's military tactics in Lebanon with the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is demented enough. But that she should go on to defend the use of the atom bomb by the United States (which in any other context she would surely condemn) in order to score an invidious point against Israel is a measure of how far her animus extends. It literally knows no bounds.

OBVIOUSLY a reaction like this can no more have been provoked by the facts of Israel's behavior than the comparisons of Israel with Nazi Germany. Nor can the relatively milder denunciations of Israel as comparable to Sparta or Haiti or Vietnam be taken as a rational response to what Israel has done. What then can explain them?

In thinking about this question while reading through dozens of vitriolic attacks on Israel, I have resisted the answer that nevertheless leaps irresistibly into the mind. This answer, of course, is that we are dealing here with an eruption of anti-Semitism. I have resisted because I believe that loose or promiscuous use of the term anti-Semitism can only rob it of force and meaning (which is what has happened to the term racism). In my judgment, therefore, it should be invoked only when the case for doing so is clear and precise. When that condition is met, however, I also believe that one has a duty to call the offending idea by its proper name.

Not everyone agrees, not even Meg Greenfield, who in *Newsweek* happily endorses "plain talk about Israel" and who as editor of the Washington *Post* editorial page has certainly done a lot of plain talking herself. Miss Greenfield sees it as a "good thing" that the "resentful, frustrated, expedient silences" Americans have maintained over Israel have now been "interrupted by outraged, emotional condemnations of what Israel is doing." Some of

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this, she acknowledges, is excessive: "The comparison [of the Israeli invasion] to Nazi policy, for instance, has been as disproportionate in its way as the military violence it complains of." But the rest is understandable, and is anyway not to be confused with being anti-Israel or anti-Semitic. Indeed these very accusations have intensified the pent-up resentments which are now exploding into what Miss Greenfield calls "no-holds-barred attacks on the Israeli action."

In other words, though we are to have "plain talk about Israel," and though such talk is healthy when directed against Israel, we are not to have equally plain talk about the attacks on Israel. To say that such "no-holds-barred attacks on Israel" are anti-Israel is unhealthy, and to say that they are anti-Semitic is even worse.

George W. Ball also rules out any use of the term anti-Semitism:

> I long ago made it a practice not to answer any letter questioning my position on Middle East problems that contains the assertion or implication that I have said or written anything anti-Semitic. That accusation, in my view, is a denial —I might even say an evasion—of rational argument.

Yet when he goes on to explain why it is absurd to accuse him of anti-Semitism, he brings forth so shallow a conception of what the term means that it can only be described as historically illiterate. Anti-Semitism, according to Ball, is the dislike of Jews; it is therefore a sufficient refutation to point out that some of his best friends are Jewish, and that all his life he has admired the Jews for their contribution to the arts, to intellectual life, and to liberal political causes.

That a man of George Ball's experience and education should regard this as an adequate account of anti-Semitism reveals an astonishing blind spot. But this blindness is an advantage, enabling Ball to accuse American Jews of dual loyalty—a classic anti-Semitic canard that also surfaced in the debate over the AWACS—and then indignantly and self-righteously to deny that this makes him an anti-Semite.

Unlike Ball, Conor Cruise O'Brien, who has a habit of speaking plainly on all subjects, does believe that some critics of Israel are "motivated by some kind of anti-Semitic feeling, possibly unconscious." In some instances, he concedes, it may be that what is at work is "genuine compassion for suffering Arabs, expressing itself in terms of a generous hyperbole." But in most others "there are indications to the contrary." These indications include the absence of any concern for the civilian casualties in the war between Iraq and Iran, and the silence that greeted the killing of an estimated 20,000 Sunni Muslims recently by President Assad of Syria in the city of Hama. (To O'Brien's examples may be added the indifference to the 100,000 people killed in internecine strife in Lebanon since 1975 on the part of virtually all those who have wept over the civilian casualties in Lebanon since the Israelis went in.) O'Brien suggests, however, that a term other than anti-Semitic is needed because "the people in question are . . . extravagantly *philo*-Semitic these days, in their feelings for the Arabic-speaking branch of the Semitic linguistic family." He proposes "anti-Jewism," and he offers a test by which it can be detected in the discussion of Israel: "If your interlocutor can't keep Hitler out of the conversation, . . . feverishly turning Jews into Nazis and Arabs into Jews—why then, I think, you may well be talking to an anti-Jewist."

The trouble is that the term "anti-Jewist" cannot be applied to those like George Ball who are loud in their protestations of friendship for the Jewish people, and who might even agree that comparing the Israelis with the Nazis deserves to be called anti-Semitic.

Let me therefore propose that we retain the historically sanctioned term anti-Semitism and let me outline a more general criterion for identifying it than the one O'Brien suggests. Historically anti-Semitism has taken the form of labeling certain vices and failings as specifically Jewish when they are in fact common to all humanity: Jews are greedy, Jews are tricky, Jews are ambitious, Jews are clannish—as though Jews were uniquely or disproportionately guilty of all those sins. Correlatively, Jews are condemned when they claim or exercise the right to do things that all other people are accorded an unchallengeable right to do.

As applied to the Jewish state, this tradition has been transmuted into the double standard by which Israel is invariably judged. The most egregious illustration is the UN resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism. According to the thinking of this resolution, all other people are entitled to national self-determination, but when the Jews exercise this right, they are committing the crimes of racism and imperialism. Similarly, all other nations have a right to insure the security of their borders; when Israel exercises this right, it is committing the crime of aggression. So too, only Israel of all the states in the world is required to prove that its very existence—not merely its interests or the security of its borders, but its very existence—is in immediate peril before it can justify the resort to force. For example, whereas the possibility of a future threat to its borders was (rightly in my opinion) deemed a sufficient justification by the United States under John F. Kennedy to go to the brink of nuclear war in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the immense caches of arms discovered in PLO dumps in southern Lebanon have not persuaded many of the very people who participated in or applauded Kennedy's decision that the Israelis

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were at least equally justified in taking action against the PLO in Lebanon.

Criticisms of Israel based on a double standard deserve to be called anti-Semitic. Conversely, criticisms of Israel based on universally applied principles and tempered by a sense of balance in the distribution of blame cannot and should not be stigmatized as anti-Semitic, however mistaken or dangerous to Israel one might consider them to be. A good example can be found in the editorials published in the New York *Times* on Lebanon. Unlike the consistently superb editorials on Lebanon in the *Wall Street Journal*, the ones in the *Times* have been harsh on Israel, they have often been unfair, and they have pointed toward policies that would jeopardize Israel's security. But they have not been guided by the usual double standard, and therefore cannot and should not be stigmatized as anti-Semitic.

Criticisms of Israel that *are* informed by a double standard, on the other hand, deserve to be called anti-Semitic even when they are mouthed by Jews or, for that matter, Israelis. That being Jewish or possessing Israeli citizenship guarantees immunity from anti-Semitic ideas may seem a plausible proposition, but it is not, alas, borne out by experience. Like all other human beings, Jews are influenced by the currents of thought around them; and like all other minority groups, they often come to see themselves through the eyes of an unsympathetic or hostile majority. Jews are of course the majority in Israel, but the state itself is isolated among the nations, and subjected to a constant barrage of moral abuse aimed at its delegitimation. This seems finally to be taking the inevitable psychological toll in the appearance among Israelis of the term fascist in talking about their own society, when by any universal standard it is among the two or three countries in the world least deserving of this epithet.

To be sure, very few Israelis have reached the point of blaming the Arab-Israeli conflict largely on Israel or Menachem Begin or Ariel Sharon. But a number of American Jews have been adding their own special note to the whining chorus of anti-Israel columnists, State Department Arabists, and corporate sycophants of Saudi Arabia which has grown more raucous over Lebanon than ever before. The misleading impression has been created that these "dissenters" reveal a serious split within the American Jewish community over Israel. In fact, however, with a few notable exceptions they represent the same minority of roughly 10 or 15 percent which has all along either opposed Israel (because as socialists they considered Zionism a form of reactionary bourgeois nationalism or because as Reform Jews they disliked nationalism for other reasons), or else came to support Israel grudgingly and only on condition that it comport itself in accordance with their political ideas. It is these people who have lately been congratulating themselves on their courage in "speaking out" against Israel. A few of them—those who live and work within the Jewish community—are actually dissenting. But most of the rest live in milieux like the university or work in professions like journalism in which defending Israel takes far more courage than attacking it.

Not only do these people invoke a double standard in judging Israel: they proudly proclaim that they do. "Yes, there is a double standard. From its birth Israel asked to be judged as a light among the nations." These words come from one of the endless series of columns Anthony Lewis has written on the war in Lebanon. Lewis is Jewish, and even though he makes no public point of it, I single him out here because his thinking is typical of the way Jewish "dissenters" who have been signing ads and giving interviews see not only the war in Lebanon but the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

Thus while he usually pays his rhetorical respects to the Arab refusal to recognize Israel, Lewis's emphasis is always on the sins of Israel, whether real or imaginary.* And while piously proclaiming his great friendship for Israel, he harasses it relentlessly and obsessively, justifying himself in this by hiding behind the political opposition in Israel or behind Zionist heroes of the past like Justice Brandeis. (Others use the Bible for these purposes, humbly comparing themselves to the prophets of old: "[The] biblical tradition of criticism and dissent should now guide public practice," two young Jewish academics declared on the Op-Ed page of the *Times*. "Jeremiah's polemics indicate that a government's foreign and security policies, as well as societal inequity and immorality, are grounds for legitimate dissent.")

But is it true that "From its birth Israel asked to be judged as a light among the nations," or even as the socialist paradise dreamed of by so many of Israel's Jewish "friends" on the Left? No doubt there have been Zionist enthusiasts who indulged in such rhetoric, but it is a historical travesty to claim that this was the animating idea behind the Jewish state. If perfection had been the requirement, it would have been tantamount to saying that an imperfect Israel had no right to exist; and since imperfection in human beings is unavoidable, Israel would have been sentencing itself to an early death from the day of its birth.

In any event, the opposite is more nearly true: that the purpose of Israel was to *normalize* the Jewish people, not to perfect them. The Jewish state was to create not a utopia but a refuge from persecution and a haven of security in which Jews

* For an example of the latter, see Ruth R. Wisse's discussion in "The Delegitimation of Israel," in the July COMMENTARY. The case in point was a false allegation of censorship against the Israeli authorities on the West Bank, combined with complete silence about the repression of free speech on the East Bank—that is, in Jordan.

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who chose or were forced to settle there could live a peaceful and normal life. Thanks to the refusal of the Arab world to agree to this, the Jews of Israel have instead had to live in a constant state of siege. It would have been fully understandable if under those conditions Israel had become a garrison state or a military dictatorship. Yet no such development occurred. Founded as a democracy, it has remained a democracy, a particularly vital variant of the species—the only one in the Middle East and one of the few on the face of the earth.

In reminding ourselves of that enormous and wondrous fact, we come to the greatest irony of this entire debate. Although Israel is no more required than any other state to justify its existence through what Anthony Lewis or anyone else, myself included, considers good behavior; and although elementary fairness dictates that Israel not be condemned for doing things that all other nations are permitted to do as a matter of course; even so, even judged by the higher standard that Lewis and his ilk demand, the truth is that Israel *has* become a light unto the nations.

THUS, in remaining a free democratic society while surrounded by enemies and forced to devote an enormous share of its resources to defense, Israel has demonstrated that external threats do not necessarily justify the repression of internal liberties. For casting this light, in whose glare the majority of the nations of the world stand exposed, Israel not surprisingly wins no friends at the UN.

If its persistence in democratic ways under the most unpromising circumstances has helped win Israel the enmity of the Third World, the fierceness of its will to live is what has made it a scandal and a reproach to its fellow democracies in the Western world. For in the glare of *that* light, the current political complexion of the Western democracies takes on a sickly, sallow, even decadent look. We in the West confront in the Soviet Union a deadly enemy sworn to our destruction, just as Israel does in the Arab world. But whereas the Israelis have faced the reality of their peril and have willingly borne the sacrifices essential to coping with it, we in the West have increasingly fallen into the habit of denial, and we have shown ourselves reluctant to do what the survival of our civilization requires. We tell ourselves that the danger comes from our own misunderstanding and misperception; we castigate ourselves for being the main cause of the conflict; we urge unilateral actions upon ourselves in the hope of appeasing the enemy.

It is a rough rule of thumb that the more deeply this complex of attitudes is rooted in an individual or a group or a nation, the more hostility it will feel toward Israel. I readily admit that other factors also come into play. Anxiety over oil or business connections in the Arab world often turn people against Israel who might otherwise admire it precisely for setting the kind of example of realism and courage they would wish the West to follow. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger is perhaps one such case and there are others scattered through the Defense Department, the State Department, and the White House. There are also so-called hardliners where the Soviet Union is concerned (Evans and Novak come to mind) who have always believed that a tilt away from Israel and a more "evenhanded" policy in the Middle East is necessary if we are to contain the spread of Soviet power and influence in that region. This idea dies so hard that it may even survive the tremendous blow it has suffered in Lebanon.

On the other side, one can find many American Jews and liberal politicians concerned about Jewish support who back Israel even though in most other situations they tend to sympathize with forces comparable to the PLO (such as the guerrillas in El Salvador) and even though they are great believers in the idea that all disputes can and should be settled through negotiation.

Even allowing for these complications, however, one can still say that the more committed to appeasement of the Soviet Union a given party is, and the more it opposes "military solutions to political problems," the more hostile it will be to Israel. Thus the West European governments—the very governments which are so eager to prop up the Soviet economy, to ignore Afghanistan and Poland, and to ratify Soviet military superiority in Europe through arms-control negotiations—are far less friendly to Israel than is the American government. And within the United States itself, the people who are most sympathetic to the European point of view on the issue of the Soviet threat are among those least friendly to Israel.

These are the same Americans who also tend to pride themselves on having learned "the lessons of Vietnam"—lessons which, as Terry Krieger points out in a brilliant piece in the Washington *Times*, Israel has now dramatically refuted. For Israel has shown that military force is sometimes necessary; that the use of military force may also be beneficial; and that a Soviet client, "whether it be a guerrilla force or a terrorist organization," can be defeated by an American ally. This, Krieger thinks, is why such people have turned on Israel with vitriolic fury: "Those Americans who have denounced Israel's invasion of Lebanon eventually may forgive Israel for defending itself, but they may never forgive Israel for illuminating our own confusion and cowardice."

Again Anthony Lewis offers himself as a good illustration. Indeed, the terms in which he has denounced Israel's invasion of Lebanon are strongly reminiscent of the hysterical abuse he used to heap on the United States in Vietnam. This being so, it is worth remembering that Lewis called the Christ-

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mas 1972 bombing of Hanoi—in which by the estimate of the North Vietnamese themselves no more than 1,600 were killed—"The most terrible destruction in the history of man" and a "crime against humanity." It is worth recalling too that only days before the Khmer Rouge Communists would stake a claim to precisely that description by turning their own country into the Auschwitz of Asia, Lewis greeted their imminent seizure of power with the question: "What future possibility could be more terrible than the reality of what is happening to Cambodia now?" Yet with that record of political sagacity and moral sensitivity behind him, Lewis has the effrontery to instruct Israel on how to insure its security, and he has the shamelessness to pronounce moral judgment upon the things Israel does to protect itself from the kind of fate at the hands of the Arabs that has been visited by the Communists upon South Vietnam and Cambodia.

THE Bible tells us that God commanded the ancient Israelites to "choose life," and it also suggests to us that for a nation, the choice of life often involves choosing the sacrifices and horrors of war. The people of contemporary Israel are still guided by that commandment and its accompanying demands. This is why Israel is a light unto other peoples who have come to believe that nothing is worth fighting or dying for.

But there is more. In the past, anti-Semitism has been a barometer of the health of democratic societies, rising in times of social or national despair, falling in periods of self-confidence. It is the same today with attitudes toward Israel. Hostility toward Israel is a sure sign of failing faith in and support for the virtues and values of Western civilization in general and of America in particular. How else are we to interpret a political position that, in a conflict between a democracy and its anti-democratic enemies, is so dead set against the democratic side?

Even on the narrower issue of American interests, George Ball, Anthony Lewis, and those who share their perspective are so driven by their animus against Israel as to think that (in Lewis's astonishing words) "Looking at the wreckage in Lebanon, the only people who can smile are the radicals and the Russians." Yet consider: Israel, an American ally, and armed with American weapons, has defeated the Syrians and the PLO, both of them tied to and armed by America's enemy, the Soviet Union. Are the Russians insane that this should cause them to smile? The military power of the PLO, representing the forces of radicalism and anti-Americanism in the Middle East, has been crushed; and (unless Ball and the others, who are so desperate to save it, should work their will) its power to terrorize and intimidate may also be destroyed, leaving the way open for such forces of moderation as may exist in the Arab world to come forward. How should this make the radicals smile and the United States weep? Egypt, America's best friend in the Arab world, has been strengthened and the policy of accommodation it has pursued toward Israel has been vindicated in comparison with the rejectionist policies of Syria and the PLO. Can this be good for the Russians and damaging to American interests?

George Ball says that it can be and that it is. But this is so palpably absurd that it cannot be taken as the considered judgment of an informed and objective mind. Therefore if it is proper to indict anyone in this debate for bias and insufficient concern for American interests, it is Ball who should be put in the dock and not the Jewish defenders of Israel against whom he himself has been pleased to file this very indictment.

In the broadside from which I have borrowed the title of this essay, Emile Zola charged that the persecutors of Dreyfus were using anti-Semitism as a screen for their reactionary political designs. I charge here that the anti-Semitic attacks on Israel which have erupted in recent weeks are also a cover. They are a cover for a loss of American nerve. They are a cover for acquiescence in terrorism. They are a cover for the appeasement of totalitarianism. And I accuse all those who have joined in these attacks not merely of anti-Semitism but of the broader sin of faithlessness to the interests of the United States and indeed to the values of Western civilization as a whole.

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Liberalism & Theodore H. White

James Nuechterlein

WHEN Theodore H. White first developed the ideas that eventuated in his *Making of the President* series in the late 1950's, both he and the nation whose politics he intended to chronicle were filled with energy, confidence, and enthusiasm. The future looked promising for each, and, at least at first, indeed it was. White told the story of the 1960 election in a way that no one had quite done before, and the telling made him deservedly rich and famous, while John Kennedy's narrow victory over Richard Nixon seemed to offer the nation a political revitalization that would add purpose and direction to a society already endowed with unprecedented prosperity and power. If White, who began his career reporting for *Time* magazine, had never quite bought Henry Luce's version of the American century, he nonetheless wrote as an unapologetic patriot (years of living in Asia and Europe had, as is the case with so many Americans who reside abroad, accentuated rather than weakened his attachment to his country), and JFK's coming to power promised White, and millions of liberals like him, a new age of American greatness. For America in general, and for those attached to what White calls "the liberal idea" in particular, the customary American faith in an illimitable future seemed particularly appropriate as of November 1960.

And yet, within a relatively few years, everything fell apart. "Somewhere," White writes, "came a wrong turning." We can now see that liberal optimism died with Kennedy at Dallas in 1963, though there was no apparent reason to suspect so at the time. Indeed, the death of Kennedy appeared initially to unleash a great flood of liberal energy and legislation, at first as a kind of homage to the fallen leader ("this is what he would have wanted") and then as a result of Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory over Barry Goldwater in 1964, a victory interpreted as a mandate to extend and perfect what the New Deal had begun some thirty years earlier. The Great Society Congresses of the mid-60's produced the most extraordinary legislative outpouring of any period in American history, Franklin Roosevelt's first presidential term possibly excepted.

Yet what seemed at first liberalism's glorious culmination quickly turned into what White later would call "the storm decade," ten years during which America seemed to be coming apart under the successive onslaughts of racial divisions and riots, massive protests and dissension over Vietnam, student rebellion, the beginnings of what became, in White's term, "the Great Inflation," and —just when domestic peace appeared uneasily restored—the Watergate scandal. Watergate could hardly be laid at liberalism's door (it in fact provided liberals their only consolation, however negative, of the era) but all the other crises of the time posed particular problems for, and created unsettling divisions within, the liberal community. It would be excessive and unfair to argue that liberalism "caused" the crises of the 60's and 70's, but those crises exposed certain weaknesses in liberal thought, and the weaknesses acted in turn to deepen the effects of the crises.

And things did not get better after the storm decade blew itself out. By the mid-70's, a nervous calm had returned to America, but Jimmy Carter's Presidency restored neither national confidence nor liberal morale. Carter's rudderless moralizing left the nation drifting in only random movement, while political initiative and enthusiasm shifted from the political Left to the political Right.

Theodore White recorded all this in his quadrennial accounts of the struggle for the Presidency, although he skipped the Carter-Ford race in 1976 to write *In Search of History*, the story of his personal political journeyings from the radicalism of his youth to the troubled, even bewildered, centrist liberalism he represents today. White's career never took the bashing that the country went through. In one sense, he flourished as the nation floundered. Yet the declining curve of American fortunes affected White's writing, and not for the better. As a citizen, White suffered during his nation's misfortunes; as a political analyst and a liberal, he never fully managed to understand and explain where things had gone wrong. The public continued eagerly to await and read his accounts, and the critics remained more respectful than not,

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but over time White's books, like the nation they described, lost their mastery.

As with almost everyone else, White had not anticipated America's time of troubles after 1963. A man who had always been a positive thinker (in the best sense), White found it easier to write of heroes and successes than to record a continuing decline and fall. None of the books that followed *The Making of the President—1960* worked as well as the original did. That is not difficult to understand; White with that book made himself a very hard act to follow.

It is difficult now to recall how great White's initial impact was. In 1960 the approach was fresh and the circumstances of the election coincided perfectly with the author's method and strengths. By the late 1950's White had accumulated an unsurpassed knowledge of American political culture, and in conceiving the notion of joining that knowledge with an approach to presidential politics grounded in techniques of good storytelling (he had published two novels based on actual events), he happened on the formula that revolutionized the reporting of American politics and made him the best-known print journalist in the country. The Kennedy-Nixon election provided the ideal occasion for White to apply his sense of "History as Story": he had a plausible hero, a more than plausible villain, and, as it turned out, a happy ending. (White's then wife observed shrewdly of his project, "It's probably a good book if Kennedy wins. But if Nixon wins, it's a dog.")

After Dallas, there were few happy endings. White kept his series going, but after 1960 he had, in addition to an endless chain of competitors, less promising materials with which to operate. The Johnson-Goldwater race of 1964 lacked drama, and White could never muster for Johnson anything like the hero-worship he lavished on Kennedy. One could also begin to detect in *The Making of the President—1964* traces of the doubts concerning liberal orthodoxy that were to increase steadily with each of White's later books. The man who could describe himself as of 1963 as "an almost perfect specimen of American liberal thinking" was beginning, a few years later, to harbor doubts about the directions in which liberalism was heading.

The doubts made for more balanced assessments. By the late 60's, for example, White had developed a grudging admiration for Richard Nixon, an admiration that embarrassed White with his critics after Watergate but which revealed not so much the fawning deference toward power that White's detractors charged him with as a willingness to concede that the pre-Watergate Nixon was a far more accomplished President than most liberals could bear to acknowledge. But White's new doubts also made for a less confident, assured, and cohesive narrative style. And as successive Presidencies brought waves of fresh disasters, the positive, America-will-prevail mood of White's first books gave way in later volumes to ever more gloomy accounts and ever more melancholy uncertainties. America was in trouble, liberalism was in crisis, and White's once abundant supply of politician-heroes seemed permanently exhausted.

Thus reviewers, especially on the Left, began to argue that White had burned himself out, that having used up the possibilities of a once fresh genre, he was now merely forcing himself, out of habit and contractual obligation, through routine motions of political journalism that no longer offered inspiration to him or revelation to his readers. He had, it was said, gone "establishment," becoming excessively sympathetic to those currently or potentially in power and sourly dismissive of any but the most mild challenges from all those—ethnic and racial minorities, women, youthful radicals, the poor—located outside the comfortable boundaries of the community of power and influence of which White was now so securely a member.

Meanwhile, the indictment continued, White's style had gone soft and his once vigorous analytical perspectives had degenerated to empty, pious generalizations and to alarmist handwringing that things were no longer so stable as before and the lower orders no longer so manageable as they once had been. White's preferred America, it was charged, was a place of genial and bland reform where change challenged no one and where people knew and kept their places. To radicals, White became a kind of liberal Norman Rockwell, portrayer of a mythical American society in which virtue always went rewarded (with a little help, where necessary, from the welfare state) and where patrician liberals presided over just that precise degree of reform required to avoid the untoward.

All of this criticism has been evident in the reaction to White's concluding volume on presidential politics, *America in Search of Itself: The Making of the President, 1956-1980.** As a summing-up, the book has invited assaults from those jealous of White's extraordinary success or disgruntled by his gradual shift away from the Left. Much of the criticism is beneath serious notice. Readers for whom success does not automatically suggest moral compromise or who have no ideological axe to grind will find *America in Search of Itself* up to White's high standards in most respects.

As usual, White has united encyclopedic information with shrewd perception, and the book will hold the customary fascination for all those political junkies who have constituted the hard core of White's audience. Two qualities have always

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dominated White's books: his love for his country and his fascination with its politics. Badgered, one suspects, by his critics, White several years ago referred to his unabashed patriotism as "my worst weakness as a professional journalist." It is, instead, at the heart of his strength. White knows as much of the history and wondrously rich detail of modern American politics as anyone now living, and that knowledge, sustained and fed by his prior love for America's political tradition, has made him as good as he is. He is still a premier political journalist, and the *Making of the President* series will hold its own for a long time to come as the standard against which aspiring analysts will have to measure their work.

Yet White's critics cannot entirely be dismissed. For all its virtues, this is a less than fully satisfactory book. One puts it down grateful for the information and insight it has provided, but uncertain of its explanatory powers. White has always been essentially a storyteller (though one gifted with analytical skills), and the narrative form can only go so far in achieving what White here intends. Beyond his usual desire to describe and explain what happened in the course of the most recent presidential contest, he wants to make sense of the larger pattern of American politics since the 1950's. In this he falls short, though not primarily for the reasons his critics suggest.

White's problem is not, as has variously been proposed, that he has burned out, or sold out, or lost interest in his subject. It is rather that he does not push hard enough or far enough with the knowledge and intuition he has. White senses much of what has gone wrong with America, but he does not sufficiently focus or follow up his own perceptions. He rightly indicates that the country has come undone because liberalism has come undone, but his explanation of liberalism's undoing is only partially satisfactory.

One suspects that the reason for this lies not in any deficiency in White's analytical abilities but rather in the kind of myopia characteristic of those required to criticize that to which they are indissolubly attached. White finds it difficult to specify just where and why his "liberal idea" took its "wrong turning"; thus at crucial points his conclusions go slack and amorphous ("I write and close this book in a clouded time, not knowing whether it is twilight or dawn, an era ending or an era beginning"). To White, the liberal decline represents a falling away from the glorious days of Kennedy's Camelot. Kennedy remains White's only contemporary political hero, and he has conceded that "I still have difficulty seeing John F. Kennedy clear." Because of that difficulty, he never considers the possibility that liberalism after Kennedy represented not so much a falling away as a working out of certain inner contradictions within liberalism that were already visible, in nascent forms at least, during the Kennedy years.

White laments that the liberal Center has not held, and one can sympathize with and echo that lament. But the collapse of the Center finds its origins not in the Great Society or beyond but in essential tensions within modern liberalism that are far more deeply rooted than White suspects. In addition, his analysis of where liberalism went astray fails fully to satisfy because it leaves out some essential elements in the story.

But before attempting to specify where White's argument falls short, it is first necessary to present that argument in some detail.

II

WHITE understands that the election of 1980 involved more than the repudiation of an unpopular President. While it is true that in personality terms it became as hard by the end of the campaign to like Jimmy Carter as to dislike Ronald Reagan, Carter lost more because of the burdens of ideology and policy associated with his party than because of the burdens of his own distant and unresponsive personality. White correctly notes that the Iranian hostage crisis and high inflation rates were the immediate issues that did Carter in (he adds—questionably to my mind—the influence of the media as a third major element in the election), but he is aware that these specific problems were the end result of "a revolution of goodwill [that] had run its course." The Democratic party as of 1980 was so constituted as to make weakness in foreign policy and indiscipline in domestic affairs its characteristic response.

It was ironic, in fact, that Carter should have had to bear ideological freight since he had originally won the Presidency as an outsider, a designation that freed him not only from the taint of corruption Watergate had visited on all national politicians but also from the suspicion of liberal orthodoxy that was already by 1976 a political liability. Indeed, the left wing of his party found him so unacceptably moderate in office that it seized on his personal unpopularity and his administration's general reputation for ineptitude as an excuse to attempt to deny him renomination. Yet the dynamics of national Democratic politics had drawn Carter to the Left (even as involvement in the Republican party pushes politicians to the Right), and on certain key issues—a definition of pluralism that amounted to a quota system for political appointment and participation, or an application of human-rights policy in foreign affairs that did more damage to regimes friendly to the United States than to those opposed to it—he situated himself firmly in the New Politics wing of his party.

Jimmy Carter's ideological dilemmas presented a classic instance of the change—and, in White's view, the decline—in American political culture

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from the 1950's to the 1970's. The politics of the 50's (what White refers to as the "Old Country") rested on a system of local machines and bosses, predictable and more-or-less deliverable voting blocs, moderate reform, unforced pluralism (it was considered bad form to speak publicly of the ethnic and religious elements that all politicians took privately into account), and a widespread consensus—again often unspoken—that the legitimacy of the society depended on a promise of equal opportunity which nonetheless offered no guarantees as to equal outcomes.

White knows that the system worked only imperfectly and that it tolerated serious injustices, especially with respect to the widespread exclusion of black people from the opportunity structure. Yet he writes of it with warmth and enthusiasm, and not simply out of nostalgia for a lost past. For all its faults, the Old Country worked: America in the 50's was powerful, prosperous, and contented, a society marked by a "happy stability" that White understandably recalls with affection. It was a society at once "responsive to need and popular control" and yet manageable; it struggled for reform without losing touch with economic and social reality.

Yet the Old Country carried within itself the seeds of change and dissolution. The "politics of goodwill" was making its inroads, and under it any proposal, however unrealistic, to which the "color of virtue" could be attached, would, with the aid of the "cause people" and the "image-makers," be taken up and translated into a moral imperative that the old system could not easily assimilate. After the death of Kennedy, as White has it, the New Politics exploded out of control, as opportunity gave way to equality and the Great Society and its successors, determined to remedy all past injustices at once, spawned a bewildering proliferation of causes, reforms, entitlements, rights, and quota systems, all of them, it seemed, requiring a supporting network of bureaucratic and regulatory controls.

White's response to the cascade of reform is at once sympathetic and critical. Much of the change, he concedes, was justified, even overdue. Most of it came from good intentions. But its costs, he thinks, were great as well. Literally so, to begin with. Budget figures rose stupendously, under Democrats and Republicans alike, and the bulk of the new outlays came not from military expenditures, as was and still is commonly supposed, but from myriad transfer payment and entitlement programs. The result, in the face of a bipartisan unwillingness to raise taxes accordingly, was inflation, which, as White trenchantly describes it, "comes when a government has made too many promises it cannot keep and papers over the shortfall with currency." Eventually, he goes on, the currency "becomes confetti—and faith is lost." And lost faith in the currency quickly enough translates into lost faith in the political system.

Beyond the dollar figures lay other costs. The system quickly developed symptoms of overload, in which a government given too many things to do found it difficult to do any of them well. Furthermore, the effects of all these programs on the people they were intended to benefit were not unambiguously beneficial. In the name of conscience and compassion, the government was turning itself, in White's words, into a "nourisher of dependency." Liberals ran the risk of reducing the poor and disadvantaged entirely to victim status, people with neither independent moral wills nor autonomous personalities.

Worst of all, in White's view, affirmative-action programs had degenerated into a set of mindless quota requirements, in which the rewards of the society were to be distributed not according to ability and desert but according to a set of statistical categories arranged by race, sex, age, and ethnic origin. The fundamental American idea of equality of opportunity had been undermined, and the result, White feared, would be the splintering of the society. Would America remain a nation united in diversity, or would it become simply a place where an endless variety of noncomplementary groups competed for marginal advantages in a perpetual zero-sum war?

For the Democrats and Jimmy Carter, the fruits of reform were bitter. A party that had fallen into the trap of what White, recalling Jefferson, calls "governing too much" suffered a massive defeat in 1980. White passes relatively quickly over the details of the presidential campaign, which he summarizes as the "breakup of the grand coalition." He is right to do so, for the particulars of the election struggle—Reagan's early blunders, Carter's later "meanness," the debate (which Reagan won simply by demonstrating he was not the bomb-throwing blockhead the Democrats had made him out to be)—mattered less than the underlying rebellion by the electorate against liberal Democratic control. The Republicans in 1980 were more united—and more conservative—than at any time since the New Deal, and their gains in the Senate and House, combined with their inroads in the suburbs and among blue-collar, ethnic, and Catholic voters, indicated that the election may well have signaled, as White suggests, the end of the liberal postwar era.

III

Like many Americans, White exhibits considerable ambivalence over the passing (at least for now) of the liberal age. His disenchantment with what liberalism has become over the past fifteen years is unmistakable. He is no friend of the New Politics. At the same time, he has not converted to conservatism, either. His treatment of Ronald Reagan is not unfriendly,

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and he obviously finds the President personally attractive, but he maintains a careful distance from him throughout the book. One can read easily enough between the lines that White finds Reagan intellectually unimpressive and that he is not at all persuaded of the wisdom of supply-side economics or other basic elements in the new administration's programs. White several times refers (rightly enough) to Reagan's ideological dogmatism, and he makes no attempt to hide his distaste for the social conservatism of the New Right. He makes several slighting references, for example, to the Moral Majority, the National Rifle Association, and "the anti-abortion fanatics."

White's problem is that he is an old-fashioned liberal centrist—and there's hardly anyone left standing with him in the liberal Center. His wistful admiration for John Kennedy involves more than attraction to an urbane and graceful personality; it involves, as well, affinity for the politics of a man who was, White says, "the model of an enlightened Tory." White notes the gradual drift leftward of the Kennedy brothers—from Jack, the enlightened Tory, to Robert, representative of the New Politics, and finally to Edward, whom White describes as a man "of the unabashed liberal extreme." White does not say so, but the curve of the Kennedy family's liberalism describes the direction of the mainstream American Left over the past two decades. For today Edward Kennedy, he of the "unabashed liberal extreme," is the clear favorite to win the Democratic party's nomination for President in 1984. And if he does win, the race he will run against either Ronald Reagan or a conservative very much like him will characterize the polarized nature of American politics.

White, who has always been a strong American exceptionalist, underestimates the degree to which ideological divisions have entered national politics since the 1960's. He finds categories of liberal and conservative of little value in understanding America and insists that it is "wholly useless" to apply "European" models of Left and Right to the American scene. That is unfortunately less true than it used to be. American politics are not, of course, as class-influenced as those of most of Europe, but White's argument that America is more about "ideas and dreams" than about "interests" ignores the extent to which competing versions of those ideas and dreams have taken on intense ideological meaning. One of his own central themes in analyzing recent American political history—the conflict between opportunity and equality—involves a fundamental ideological battle. A politics devoted to equal group outcomes as its governing norm cannot easily be reconciled with the traditional American value of individual equality of opportunity.

White misses this in part because he pays almost no attention to the central political fact of our time: the ideological overflow from the war in Vietnam. The war shattered the American consensus, and not just in foreign policy. Critics of the war, unwilling to believe that so disastrous a venture could simply be attributed to individual errors in judgment or to misplaced good intentions, came increasingly to place their criticism in the context of an ever-broadening critique of the "systemic" causes which, they became convinced, lay behind American involvement. An evil so great could only issue from an evil system: the fundamental fault must reside in the very nature of the American political economy.

Vietnam led directly to the political radicalizing of a significant portion of America's educated young men and women. Much of that has worn off, but a critical residue remains. University and church circles across the country resonate with Marxist and quasi-Marxist categories of analysis (often not labeled or recognized as such) to a degree not experienced since the 1930's. Much of the criticism of American foreign policy has its roots in a kind of neo-Leninist theory of imperialism (again normally unlabeled) that the Vietnam war made respectable and that surfaces regularly in discussion of American involvement in Latin America and elsewhere. And that kind of criticism of foreign policy blends into and reinforces the left-wing perspectives on domestic affairs. Moral corruption abroad, it is assumed, must reflect moral corruption at home.

Prior to Vietnam, virtually all Americans, whatever their political differences, believed in the fundamental goodness and rightness of the American system. Large numbers of them no longer do, and the distance between the disenchanted and those who still see democratic capitalism as a system worth defending reflects itself everywhere in our political life and thought. Even many on the Left who explicitly reject Marxist categories (and they remain a clear majority) have nonetheless experienced a moral distancing from their society and have persuaded themselves that the system requires "fundamental change," generally in the direction of greater egalitarianism pursued under government aegis. They no longer believe in America as it is, and that loss of faith has changed American liberalism and the dynamics of American politics. White barely touches on any of this, and his account suffers for it.

WHAT lends considerable irony to the situation is that the relevant background to the deracination of liberalism over Vietnam lies in the administration of White's hero, John Kennedy. The point here has to do not with whether or not Kennedy bears direct responsibility for Vietnam or what his policy there would have been had he lived, but rather with the Kennedy style of political discourse and its relationship to the contemporary liberal ethos. White is right to identify Kennedy as a political moderate,

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but he does not sufficiently emphasize that Kennedy characteristically indulged in political rhetoric that did not coincide with, and in some ways was used to disguise, his centrist politics. The disjunction between rhetoric and practice turned out to have significant consequences.

Kennedy's generation came to political maturity in an era of crisis and of heroic response to crisis. The successive cataclysms of the Depression and World War II left as their legacy to those growing up under them the sense that the normal condition of politics is one of perpetual moral mobilization in the face of continuous social emergency. Politics thus considered involved high ends and noble purposes, deep commitments and grand passions.

This mood did not coincide well with the conditions of the postwar world, especially by the mid-50's. Prosperity had eroded the foundation of the activist reform spirit behind the New Deal, and the cold war, which had for a time served as a surrogate national cause, had over the years become highly routinized and accepted as a more-or-less stable given of the world scene. On one level, Kennedy and his fellow liberals thoroughly understood and adjusted to the new nature of things, as reflected in their decidedly moderate policy stances. Yet even as the politics of the New Deal became obsolete, most liberals felt it necessary to attempt to sustain its spirit. Even without conditions of war or economic crisis, politics to them still required generation of what Kennedy's adviser and speechwriter, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., called a "sense of glowing national purpose."

It was the Eisenhower administration's apparent lack of such high purpose that most exercised its liberal critics, and it was restoration of that purpose that Kennedy and his supporters identified as the special gift he would bring to the Presidency. Thus all the talk of vigor and energy and idealism, of getting the country moving again, that dominated the Kennedy campaign. Yet to all the idealism that his oratory suggested ("we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe . . .") Kennedy attached only the most mild policy prescriptions. His rhetoric covered a cautious, pragmatic, hard-headed politics. So, to cite just one example, the administration's Alliance for Progress with Latin America promised "a vast cooperative effort, unparalleled in magnitude and nobility of purpose" that would "transform the American continent into a vast crucible of revolutionary ideas and efforts." Yet the Alliance in action delivered nothing like what those words implied, as everyone who participated had known ahead of time would be the case.

The language of heroic dreams bore little discernible relation to the centrist policies that normally followed the speeches. It was a politics of gesture and style, not necessarily hypocritical, but intended to convey general mood and desire rather than specific intent: there was always less there than met the ear. For the men and women of Kennedy's generation, this created no problem. They understood the therapeutic and ritualistic function of liberal political rhetoric—having become fully accustomed to it under Adlai Stevenson, Kennedy's predecessor as leader of the liberal community—and did not expect that there should be any precise fit between words and action. Beneath the language of alarm and moral concern so prevalent in their discourse, most of them felt that America essentially was working well.

But among young people things were different. White indicates the effect John Kennedy had in arousing genuine idealism among the young, but he does not seem to understand how bitter was the sense of betrayal when youthful idealism caught on to the characteristic discrepancy between liberal words and liberal deeds. The young interpreted words and promises literally, not ritualistically. As Eugene McCarthy said of George McGovern in a different context, they were weak on metaphor. Thus, after Kennedy was gone, when liberals found it difficult to match performance to promise in Vietnam or in race relations or in wars on poverty, youthful idealism thwarted turned to radical alternatives, in the guise either of unfocused moral rage or of all-too-focused ideological assault on the American system.

And liberal elders, confronted by radical youth, found it difficult to refute the outraged cries of betrayal. They had been trapped by their own words, and they now had either to reformulate their words better to fit reality or attempt to force reality to conform to their words. Most chose the latter course. Some of them went through their own process of radicalization, and even among those who did not there was evidence of an intense new moralism, born of a conviction that America, if it hoped to attain moral legitimacy, would have to bridge a gap between dream and fulfillment which to that point had been taken as being in the nature of things. The interplay between specific events—Vietnam in particular—and the latent utopianism of liberal politics thus acted to move the liberal Center sharply to the Left, which in turn significantly affected the dynamics of the entire political system. White understands that the process took place, but his analysis, in what it leaves out and in where it stops short, can only partially account for it.

Now White and the rest of us are left with a politics polarized and rendered ideological well beyond the American norm. Consider the Republican party. The Republicans had great success in 1980 even though they violated one of the presumed cardinal rules of party behavior: construct a large umbrella that takes in as broad a range of the political spectrum as pos-

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sible. The Republicans of today are for all intents and purposes exclusively a party of the Right, and until very recently, that was presumed to be a guarantee of political disaster. (White notes the virtual disappearance of liberal Republicanism, but says little about it.) The explanation for Republican success may well lie less in any great swing of public opinion to conservatism than in the Republicans' good fortune in being the only plausible alternative to a Democratic party that handled power ineptly and that has no visible set of policy proposals appropriate to current conditions. The left wing of the party is discredited and the Center is difficult to locate.

We hear endless calls for, and occasional sightings of, a new liberalism (neoliberalism has replaced neoconservatism as the political journalists' hot new topic), but, so far at least, the content of the new liberalism remains obscure. Much of it comes down to a Democratic version of the old Republican theme of "me-tooism." For years, the Republican program consisted in effect of saying that the GOP would do the same as the New Dealers, only cheaper. Today the Democrats promise they will do the same as Reagan, only more humanely.

The liberals' dilemma is that while they know intellectually and politically that the old liberalism of omnicompetent government at home and noble intentions abroad is dead and must be replaced by something new, they are not yet convinced in their hearts that it is so. Recall the Democratic convention of 1980: amid persistent calls by observers and participants alike of the need for new departures, it experienced its only moment of genuine enthusiasm in response to a speech by Senator Kennedy that could well have been delivered by FDR at the height of the New Deal and that gave no evidence of awareness that FDR was thirty-five years dead. When not indulging in bouts of nostalgia, mainstream liberalism is reduced, in the absence of a viable program, to the condition conservatives endured for years: watch, wait, criticize, and hope the opposition manages to do itself in.

No wonder an old centrist liberal like Theodore White writes such melancholy books these days.

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Vietnam Under Communism

Stephen J. Morris

> But let us not forget that violence does not and cannot exist by itself: it is invariably intertwined with *the lie*. They are linked in the most intimate, most organic, and most profound fashion: violence cannot conceal itself behind anything except lies, and lies have nothing to maintain them except violence. Anyone who has once proclaimed violence as his *method* must inexorably choose the lie as his *principle*.
>
> —ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN, *Nobel Lecture*

FEW political parties have so successfully enshrouded themselves in political mythology as have the Vietnamese Communists. For thirty years, the party's leaders managed to persuade many Western intellectuals and journalists that the movement they led was a nationalist movement, that it expressed the will of the Vietnamese people, and that for them, Communism was merely a means to nationalist ends, not the ultimate end itself. Even today, when the truth has been shown to be the complete opposite of this mythology, the extent of the political fraud that was perpetrated by the Vietnamese Communists is imperfectly understood, when it is not simply denied.

I

IN the wake of America's abandonment of Vietnam in 1975, many Vietnamese who had served in the administration or armed forces of the Republic, or who had had some other association with the United States, were apprehensive about their future under the new Communist regime.

The North Vietnamese leaders, though euphoric in victory, were still mindful of their future needs. They did not want openly to fulfill the prophecies of their enemies that they would conduct a great bloodbath, and they also hoped to acquire billions of dollars of U.S. aid to help in "socialist construction." Moreover, they were concerned that their takeover of the south be as painless for them as possible. The first six weeks of Communist rule in the south were thus a superb demonstration of the politics of deception.

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In May 1975, all members of the armed forces and civil administration of the defeated government were ordered to register with the new authorities. In June, they were called upon to report for "reeducation"; they were to report on certain days and at certain specific locations, according to their rank and their civil or military position. In Saigon, the regime began by ordering all soldiers and noncommissioned officers of the former South Vietnamese army (ARVN), as well as low-level administrators and policemen, to report for "reform study" for three days. These study sessions were held in Saigon from 7 A.M. to 4 P.M. Personnel were allowed to go back home in the evening.

Then on June 11, 1975, the Military Management Committee issued a communiqué calling upon all *senior* officers of the former army, all police officers, and "personnel of the puppet administration in various branches belonging to the legislative, judiciary, and executive systems of the United States and its puppets," as well as members of "reactionary political parties" holding any official title within those parties, to report for what seemed, again, to be a relatively brief period of reform study. The individuals concerned were told:

> Persons gathering for study should bring along enough paper, pens, clothes, mosquito nets, personal effects, food or money for a month beginning from the first meeting.

Finally, on June 20, an official communiqué ordered all *junior* officers of the ARVN (from second lieutenant to captain), junior police officers, and intelligence cadres to report for reeducation at various locations. Once again the clear intimation was that the reeducation courses would last for a short time.

Yet while the NCO's and ordinary soldiers were detained only for the brief time stated, the officers and civil servants of rank were shifted away to special camps in the countryside. Most of the senior officers and civil servants, and prominent figures in political parties, were deported to North Vietnam. Today, seven years after incarceration, most have still not been released.

These "reeducation" camps are forced-labor camps, employing political indoctrination. The inmates include not only military, police, and intelligence officers, former government officials, and staff of non-Communist political parties, but also, it ap-

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pears, the entire membership of the elite ARVN units (the Marines, the Rangers, paratroopers, and Green Berets), participants in the Phoenix program, and village chiefs. Those inducted into the camp system have never been charged with any crime. In fact the whole process of arrest and detention lacks any legal basis.

How many people are there in the camps today? The Communist authorities say 20,000. But what the Vietnamese Communists say has no necessary correlation with the truth. The best available evidence suggests that the number is 200,000 in the south alone.*

Inmates are forced to undertake manual labor—yet their food rations are totally inadequate for that. My own interviews with refugees who were inmates indicate that by late 1978 the rice ration had dropped to between 400 and 470 grams per day. Today, with Vietnam's overall food situation even worse, that ration has undoubtedly dropped further. Meat is normally provided only on national holidays. Medical supplies are virtually nonexistent. Thus malnutrition and disease are slowly killing off the inmates. For most, the only hope of release is if a relative is able to bribe an appropriate official. Those caught trying to escape are usually executed.

Thus Hanoi has avoided the international and domestic problems that would arise if it carried out a wave of executions. It can kill its enemies slowly and quietly, while extracting labor from them in the process.

Apart from the "reeducation" camps there is an enormous prison system in Vietnam today. It has become the "waiting room" for tens of thousands of priests, monks, political figures, artists, writers, journalists, and lawyers. In fact a sizable chunk of what might be called the intelligentsia of South Vietnam has been arrested and incarcerated in this prison system. To the new authorities, the precise attitude one had toward the former regime is irrelevant; people supportive of Thieu find themselves herded together with his most vehement critics. And among those critics are not just conservatives, liberals, and social democrats. Many idealistic members of the Communist-led National Liberation Front and even of the North Vietnamese army are also incarcerated. *Their* reversal of fortune occurred when they dared after 1975 to express concern over unfulfilled promises of liberty and equality.

A former pro-NLF student activist, Doan Van Toai, who served 28 months in a Communist prison, escaped from Vietnam with two partial lists of such people in May 1978. In October 1978, the French journalist Roland Pierre Paringaux, on assignment in Vietnam for *Le Monde,* raised the question of imprisoned revolutionaries with Huynh Tan Phat, former president of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, and now vice-premier of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Phat's response was:

> One must beware of those who disguise themselves as revolutionaries in order to play the enemy's game. There are army camps and camps of the ministry of the interior [security]. If you have lists of names, address your inquiries to the ministry, it will undertake to answer you.
>
> (*Le Monde* October 5, 1978)

Torture is widespread in Vietnamese prisons today. It has been attested to, on the basis of personal experience, by Hoa Hao Buddhist activists like Nguyen Van Coi, and An Quang Buddhist activists. Many prominent prisoners, including Buddhist leaders, have died as a result of their treatment. And it is here that, in Solzhenitsyn's phrase, the lie becomes intertwined with the violence: the most common reason given for torturing prisoners is the demand for a confession of "employment by the CIA."

In addition to "reeducation" camps and the prison system, a third element in the network of special punishments devised by the Communist regime is the system of New Economic Zones (NEZ). The NEZ's are previously uncultivated and uninhabited areas of the countryside, usually barren, to which are sent certain categories of the population considered potentially disloyal. These categories include relatives of "reeducation"-camp inmates, dispossessed urban capitalists, ethnic Chinese, ex-NCO's from the former army of the Republic of Vietnam, families with a member who served in the army or administration of the French colonialists before 1954, and the unemployed.

When the regime deports people to one of the NEZ's, it expects them to support themselves by farming. Yet the land is usually unsuitable, the deportees usually have no experience of farming, and the regime provides few if any tools, fertilizer, or advice. Little wonder that many deportees consider their assignment a death sentence. The only way to avoid the rigors of life in the NEZ's is by bribing camp leaders to provide official travel papers or by escaping secretly with hope of finding a hiding place in Saigon.

It is not known how many people have actually been deported to the NEZ's, but the number of people in the social groups targeted for deportation runs into several million.†

Finally, there is one missing dimension of the repression. During the war some 220,000 Commu-

* One credible estimate has been given by Nguyen Cong Hoan, who, as a former "representative" of Phu Khanh province in the Communists' rubber-stamp National Assembly, was able to visit several of the camps in his province. Extrapolating from his province to South Vietnam as a whole, he estimated that in 1977 there were possibly 340,000 prisoners in the camps, with 200,000 as the absolute minimum. See Theodore Jacqueny, "Human Rights in Vietnam," *Free Trade Union News* 32, No. 9, September 1977.

† Some evidence has appeared recently which suggests that Vietnamese are also being deported to the Soviet Union, to work in remote regions like Siberia and thereby help pay off Vietnam's war debt. See Doan Van Toai, "What's Become of Vietnam?" *Wall Street Journal,* March 24, 1982.

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nists/NLF members defected to the side of the South Vietnamese government. By doing so these *chieu hoi* automatically entered the top of the Communist blacklists; to the Communists, "betrayal of the revolution" is one of the worst crimes anyone can commit. The *chieu hoi* were promised protection by the government, and by the United States (for whom many of them worked). This promise turned out to be as reliable as all the other U.S. commitments to South Vietnam. Since 1975 there has been no public announcement by the new regime as to the fate of the *chieu hoi.*

II

Over the last year or two, the distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes has been questioned by many American liberals, who assert that from the point of view of the victims of such regimes, it all amounts to the same thing: torture is torture. Yet—aside from the many other ways in which the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism holds true—the fact is that it *does* matter, very much, to the victims. For one thing, under the purer forms of totalitarianism, many more people are subjected to special forms of deprivation such as prisons, forced labor camps, and exile. In other words, the Gulag takes in a greater percentage of the population. For another thing, under a totalitarian regime *everybody* is a victim in some way or other.

The impact of the Vietnamese totalitarian state on everyday life of those subjects *not* persecuted—i.e., those outside the Gulag of "reeducation" camps, prisons, and New Economic Zones—is detailed in an important new book by Nguyen Long.* Long had been a student activist opposed to the Thieu and Diem regimes and to American policy in Vietnam. He was jailed twice for his political activities. This, however, did not prevent him from studying in the United States, where he acquired a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California at Berkeley in the early 1970's. On his return to Vietnam he became academic dean of the Buddhist Van Hanh University in Saigon. From there he welcomed the end of the war, expecting a period of national reconciliation and the humane social reforms the National Liberation Front had promised. He was to be bitterly disappointed. Though he did not fall into any of those social categories consigned to the Gulag, he directly experienced the pall of fear, poverty, exploitation, and corruption which has been visited upon the majority of Vietnamese by the New Order.

As Long shows, the society over which the Communist party rules is totally politicized. There is no such thing as an autonomous social organization. All Vietnamese are compelled to join a party-controlled organization (such as the Vanguard Children's Association, Ho Chi Minh Youth, the Peasants' Association, the Women's Association, the Patriotic Intellectuals' Association, the Elders' Association, and so forth). The purposes of each organization—indoctrination, surveillance, and explaining party policies and problems—are determined by the central party authorities. Every individual is expected to display loyalty to the party and its goals.

All policy is made by the Communist party leadership in Hanoi, and transmitted through provincial party committees to city, town, and village authorities. Power is also exercised "horizontally" from party to government at each administrative level, though at the lower levels of power, party and government offices frequently overlap, and most party members are also government officials. Though the party is the ultimate source of power, it prefers to remain in the background, delegating to the government the task of dealing directly with the people. Long cites the Orwellian official description of the structure of power: "The party leads, the government manages, and the people are the collective masters."

The foundation of Vietnamese Communist party power is the public-security apparatus, with its armed military units as backup. This apparatus penetrates every institution at every level, collecting information about and policing the attitudes and activities of the Vietnamese people.

There are two types of public-security operative—the overt official and the covert agent. Overt officials are uniformed and earn salaries along with the special privileges and perquisites accompanying all power-elite jobs. Covert agents are plainclothed, often work in ordinary jobs, and receive no regular salary for reporting upon their neighbors; they are usually people with politically or socially "unsound" records who work as spies in order to avoid deportation to "reeducation" camps or New Economic Zones. Others are prepared to inform upon their neighbors in return for official favors.

The ordinary citizen is not always aware who the covert agent is, and thus must be very careful in public lest he give away something that can be used against him. "Reactionary" anti-Communist views are one thing the agents are on the lookout for, although few people are foolish enough to manifest such sentiments openly. The agents are also looking for unemployed persons, who are deported back to their native village or else to the New Economic Zones, and for people seeking to flee the country (when discovered they are arrested and their property is confiscated).

Another important task of the public-security apparatus is supervising the residence habits and movements of Vietnamese citizens. Each household has a "household booklet" in which the number of permanent residents and temporary visitors is recorded. They may be checked at any time by security cadres, and the house searched. (According to

* *After Saigon Fell: Everyday Life Under the Vietnamese Communists,* Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 164 pp., $8.00.

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Long, for the first two years of the Communist regime, checks of "household booklets" and searches by security cadres were made after midnight.) Permission to travel from one area of the country to the other must be sought from the public-security office; the reason for the journey, the exact dates of departure and return, and a specific outline of the route to be taken must be given before permission is granted. Usually only part of a family may travel at any one time, so as to prevent escapes abroad. Upon arrival at the district one is visiting, one must immediately report and register with the local public-security office there.

In Vietnam today the concept of privacy has been abolished, both by the public-security apparatus and by the military, the twin props of the Communist regime. Long writes:

> In mid-1976 a young Northern soldier came to my house in the conduct of a military census. He entered the front door without knocking, went through the living room and into the dining room. My nine-year-old daughter, playing at the foot of the stairs, called out that someone was there. As I went down the stairs, I saw him already sitting at the dining table as casually as though he were in his own home. I was startled, but this young man's conduct brought me face to face with habits that have developed from many years of life under a collectivist regime, which condemns individualism and cares nothing for privacy. . . .

In the Vanguard Children's Association (equivalent to the Soviet Young Pioneers), children meet once a week under the supervision of cadres:

> At the Vanguard meetings children were asked to talk about their parents, their brothers and sisters, living conditions at home, and what the family had done during the week.

It is not surprising that as a result of this all-embracing set of social controls and surveillance, the most basic forms of social relationship have been altered:

> Life in the family has become a succession of hypocrisies necessary to protect its members, with the husband hiding his real feelings from his wife and children for fear his family might unwittingly reveal them in public. Contact with neighbors and the community has been reduced to using officially structured language to falsify emotions and protect oneself from the inquisitive security agents.

HAND in hand with the imposition of social controls has gone the imposition of controls on cultural and intellectual expression. At the end of May 1975 the new revolutionary authorities began a campaign to eradicate what they described as "reactionary" and "decadent" culture and replace it with a revolutionary and "healthy" one. The Military Management Committee ordered that all reactionary and decadent books and magazines be banned. According to the new authorities:

> Reactionary books are those whose contents serve imperialism's aggressive designs to enslave our people. Decadent books are those which debase people and incite them to follow their animal instincts such as obscene books containing nude pictures.

Ho Truong An, who before his escape from Vietnam was responsible for "evaluating" literary works in the national library, has given a more specific breakdown into types of reactionary and decadent literature*:

> A. Works which oppose Communism in any way; for example, books by Gide, Pasternak, Koestler, Solzhenitsyn, and numerous Vietnamese writers such as Vo Phien and Vu Khac Khoan.
>
> B. Decadent works: Erotic literature is especially singled out here, but the list includes Henry Miller, Elia Kazan, Françoise Sagan, D.H. Lawrence, Erskine Caldwell, Hermann Hesse, and the French existentialists Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus. The Vietnamese school of writers known as *San Tao*, who had guided the reading public into new currents of Western thought, were accused of having received American imperialist money in order to poison the reading public with an existentialist literature which is "more dangerous than nuclear radiation."
>
> C. Romantic works: The authors include Carson McCullers, Erich Segal, Somerset Maugham, and many Vietnamese writers. These are condemned as "writers who ignore the miseries of the society around them in order to write about individualistic love in a bourgeois and lazy life." Many Vietnamese poets who celebrate the beauties of nature and romantic feelings are also included here.
>
> D. Works on philosophy and religion, because "behind every religious system and every philosophical school the literature of a capitalist state aims gradually to destroy the will of mankind to struggle, and to debilitate man's spirit."

Both Hanoi and Saigon radio soon began to celebrate the success of their campaign of prohibition, listing how many tons of "decadent" and "reactionary" books and magazines had been turned over to the revolution.

IT IS often argued in defense of Communist regimes that while they deprive their people of liberty they at least provide them with social and economic justice (adequate food, clothing, education, and health care). The peculiar moral reasoning underlying this argument need not concern us here, since its factual assumption—that Communist regimes do provide socioeconomic justice—is false. Nguyen Long demonstrates this convincingly with regard to Vietnam.

In Vietnam today, all goods and services are allocated according to one's political status and one's economic class. Party members have first

* "Vietnam's Cultural Purge," *Index on Censorship*, Volume 7, Number 4, July-August 1978, pp. 3-7.

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priority, government officials and those designated "working class" second priority, and everyone else comes last. Special, restricted-access stores (a feature of all Communist countries) are a fact of life in Vietnam. The leading party members (Politburo and Central Committee) have the best local and imported food available to them. High-ranking cadres have their own special stores, where medium-quality produce is available to them. Low-ranking cadres and ordinary citizens are excluded from these stores.

Food purchases are in any case limited by ration cards. Long does not indicate whether party cadres are included in the rationing system, but he points out that in April 1978 the amount of food available to laborers was reduced from 35.2 to 26.4 pounds per month, for government employees from 26.4 to 19.8 pounds, and for "common citizens" from 17.6 pounds to 13.2 pounds. The bulk of this ration is potato and sorghum, while rice, especially white rice, has become a luxury food.

For the "common citizen" the official food ration is insufficient, and must be supplemented. But since wages are too low to enable the purchase of good food on the black market, ordinary citizens are often compelled either to sell their property and personal possessions so as to be able to supplement their diet with black-market purchases or else to purchase waste food.

Medical care in Vietnam is administered with similar concern for social and political status. The best hospitals are reserved for party members and their families. Other hospitals are reserved for middle- and lower-level cadres, government officials, and ordinary citizens, but they are subdivided into sections in which the quality of care and nutrition varies considerably. In order to be admitted to one of these hospitals, citizens must go through a lengthy and complex bureaucratic process.

Medicine is also dispensed according to one's social or political status. The ordinary citizen can only purchase a limited variety of medicines, most of which are manufactured in Vietnam, and they are generally the least effective. Workers and government officials are in a second category; if they become seriously ill, they can acquire medicines imported before 1975 (including antibiotics such as tetramycin, aureomycin, and penicillin). The best-treated category is that of the party workers, who have access to all the best medicines, usually imported.

Long relates an anecdote in which the question of privilege in today's Vietnam is asked and answered definitively:

> In a regular evening meeting of my household cluster, a citizen bravely asked: "Why are all the best foods, clothes, medicines, and supplies reserved for the cadres and party members?"
>
> The presiding cadre coolly answered: "Because they should be spared worries about their material life, in order to enable them to devote their time, energy, and zeal for the people. What else do the people expect?"

III

It is not hard to understand why the Vietnamese people might want to leave their country. The problem is that the Communist party does not want them to leave. And departing Vietnam without first receiving the government's permission is considered a hostile act against the state, an insult to the "people's power." Anybody apprehended while attempting to leave the country illegally is automatically sent to prison or a "re-education" camp for a period determined by the local authorities. It is usually at least eighteen months, and often longer.

Nevertheless, since the victory of the North Vietnamese army, tens of thousands of people have been prepared to take the risk. Their story has been told in *The Refused*, a recent book by an Australian journalist, Barry Wain.* Though much of the book deals with the inhospitable reception accorded to the refugees from Indochina by neighboring countries and the world community generally, Wain also attempts to pinpoint the responsibility of the Communist governments of Indochina, and the Vietnamese government in particular, for the exodus of their citizens.

For the first few weeks after the conquest of the south in 1975, people thought that life under the new regime might be tolerable, but by late 1975, as the ugly truth behind the "reeducation" charade became apparent, many concluded that they had to find a way of leaving. Because Vietnam is surrounded by three other Communist regimes, and the ocean, departure by boat was the only possibility. In 1975, 378 people reached another Southeast Asian country by boat from Vietnam. In 1976, 5,247 managed to do so. In 1977, 15,690 were successful.

Then in December 1977 the Vietnamese army launched its first major attacks against the Communist regime of Pol Pot in Kampuchea (Cambodia). Vietnam's action escalated a long-simmering struggle for power in Kampuchea and infuriated China, which supported Pol Pot. Now the Vietnamese Communist leaders decided that their local ethnic Chinese minority (numbering 1.5 million) was a potential "fifth column." In March 1978 the Hanoi leaders confiscated all large-scale business enterprises in South Vietnam, which were overwhelmingly Chinese-owned. In April the small-business markets in Saigon were cleaned up, and in May the regime introduced a new currency reform, which effectively wiped out savings. All the dispossessed were told that they would have to leave for their native villages, if they had come from the countryside, or else they would be deported to New Economic Zones, to start a new life as agricultural laborers. Many decided they could not accept the perils of life in the NEZ's, and would try to take their chances on the high seas. At the same time, in what was formerly North Vietnam, the regime

* Simon & Schuster, 288 pp., $16.50.

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began a separate campaign of harassment against ethnic Chinese residents, who in their thousands were driven out on foot to China.

In the south, the number leaving by boat soon increased dramatically, averaging more than 5,000 safe arrivals a month in Southeast Asia between April and July 1978, rising further to 12,540 in October and to 21,505 in November. The great majority were ethnic Chinese, who constituted a mere 3 percent of the population.

In December 1978, Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia, overthrowing the Pol Pot regime, and driving it west to the Thai border. In response to this action, China invaded Vietnam in February 1979. The war lasted one month, but China failed to dislodge the Vietnamese troops. What did result was a heightening of the anti-China hysteria of the Vietnamese Communist leaders. They then began an all-out racist pogrom against Vietnam's ethnic Chinese residents. Wain summarizes the process as it unfolded in the northern half of the country:

> Although once again no decision was announced, security officials began calling on Sino-Vietnamese and explaining that they had two choices: leave the country or be regrouped at "concentration points" away from economic centers that would become in effect New Economic Zones exclusively for ethnic Chinese.
>
> The tactics employed in the north were crude. First Sino-Vietnamese cadres in responsible positions in the party, armed forces, and other branches of the state were dumped. Ordinary ethnic Chinese were dismissed from government posts, and employers were told not to hire them. Their children were barred from schools. Their food rations were stopped, or they were threatened with such a fate if they did not meet a specified deadline to leave. A curfew was imposed on them in some areas, preventing them from leaving their homes, during the hours of darkness. Their mail was censored, their homes looted in some cases, and a few were jailed without cause. Security officials who went knocking on doors to spell out the choices followed up with warnings over loudspeakers that if Sino-Vietnamese did not leave, their protection could not be guaranteed. The pressure was maintained by regular house meetings in streets where ethnic Chinese lived. They were asked to explain why they were taking so long to depart.

These procedures seem to have been completed by the middle of 1979. By July of that year 240,000 Sino-Vietnamese had arrived in China; 30,000 to 40,000 had arrived in Hong Kong. Northern Vietnam had been cleansed of its ethnic Chinese minority.

THE removal of ethnic Chinese from *southern* Vietnam was entrusted to a section of the Public Security Bureau. Generally PSB officials used middlemen to recruit refugees and arrange for payment of fares. Prices were subject to negotiation, but tended to average 5 to 8 taels of gold per adult, half-price for children, those under the age of five or six free. Half the fee went directly to the government of Vietnam, 40 percent covered the cost of the boat, fuel, and provisions, and 10 percent was for the boat owner and organizer. However, Wain informs us:

> It was common for the PSB officials to solicit and receive bribes in addition to the negotiated payment. This was what they took on the side for their services; it did not have to be declared and passed on to the government. The bribes were paid in gold, jewelry, furniture, and anything else of value. Rolex watches were especially coveted.

The deportation program in southern Vietnam, though never publicly announced, was administered in a highly professional manner. Although the program was intended for ethnic Chinese, ethnic Vietnamese could join the boats if they could produce identity papers showing they were ethnic Chinese, and if they could pay the fees. False papers were supplied by middlemen and sometimes by the PSB itself. The PSB even sponsored the building and refitting of boats for the refugee trade.

Impatient with the pace of these operations, the Hanoi regime hit upon the idea of using large foreign freighters to accelerate the deportations. It arranged for local ethnic Chinese business associations, such as the Rice Exporters Association of Vietnam, to use their network of contacts throughout Southeast Asia to organize the freighters. Profits from the trade were then unevenly divided among the Hanoi regime, the local middlemen, and the foreign racketeers. With thousands of refugees at a time being deported on the large ships, Hanoi's profits were enormous. For example, on the ship *Huey Fong*, 1,700 adults each paid 12 taels of gold, of which 10 went to the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This amounted to a $4-million profit on one ship alone. Thus the refugee trade became a major source of foreign exchange for Hanoi, outstripping the coal industry as the country's main export earner.

As the departing ethnic Chinese handed over their property to the regime, they signed a statement along these lines:

> I am very happy to give all this property to the Vietnamese government. The government is very good to give me the opportunity to go abroad to see my family.

IV

WHEN they began their assault on Cambodia in December 1978, the Hanoi leaders justified their actions by citing the enormous atrocities which Pol Pot had carried out against the Cambodian people. But subsequent Vietnamese behavior shows the true quality of their feeling for the Khmer.

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The invading Vietnamese army prevented the planting or reaping of crops during 1979. All the food reserves of the Pol Pot regime (stored in warehouses, apparently for export) were consumed in the first months of the year. By mid-1979 Cambodia was on the verge of famine. As late as October 1979 the Vietnamese-installed government was denying any food shortage. Shortly afterward, the regime announced that it would accept aid if brought directly to Kompong Som or Phnom Penh.

The U.S., eager to send food, was reluctant to comply with the conditions laid down—it did not want to recognize the Vietnamese puppet government of Heng Samrin by dealing directly with it, and it was aware that most of the starving population was located far away from the government supply centers and there were no physical means to distribute the needed supplies. In late October 1979, President Carter appealed to the Vietnamese-installed government to permit a "land bridge" of trucks, operated not by the U.S. but by international relief agencies, to carry food from Thailand to the millions of starving Cambodians. The ruling Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council "vigorously rejected" the plan, claiming, quite dishonestly, that its own distribution procedures were adequate. It later charged that those Western governments and relief agencies which were proposing the land bridge were really trying to aid the Pol Pot forces.

The charge revealed the true motives behind Hanoi's callous intransigence: the Pol Pot forces had to be destroyed by whatever methods, and if this meant the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent Cambodians, so be it. Yet while Hanoi was unable to starve its former comrades to death, it was more successful with the civilian population. According to a carefully prepared report of the National Foreign Assessment Center of the CIA, *Kampuchea: A Demographic Catastrophe* (May 1980), in the first year of the Heng Samrin regime the population of Cambodia fell by 700,000. In other words, Hanoi's ruthless imperial drive killed in one year as many Cambodians as died in *five* years of war, 1970-75. The death toll was also equal to the worst year of the Pol Pot regime. In this way the Vietnamese Communists furthered the decimation of the Khmer people.

Nor was this the end of the Kampuchean story. Once the new regime was in place, it began to round up all Kampuchea's ethnic Chinese minority, and deport them to remote mountain areas or to Thailand.

V

In the light of their treatment of the Khmer, Vietnamese Communist behavior in Laos appears as something of a sideshow. Yet it must not be forgotten that the Vietnamese army helps keep the Communist Pathet Lao government in power. In the process it not only protects a Laotian mini-replica of Vietnam, complete with its own Gulag of "reeducation" camps and prisons, but also carries out large-scale massacres of the civilian population. The Hmong hill tribes have suffered most, since they fought on the side of the United States during the Indochina war (only to be abandoned without warning in 1975). Most of the Hmong refused to surrender to the new government, correctly fearing retribution in Pathet Lao "reeducation" camps (where approximately 40,000 others were originally incarcerated). Since the end of 1975, Vietnamese and Laotian government forces have launched air and ground attacks on the recalcitrant Hmong, drawing no distinction between soldiers and civilians. Entire villages have been wiped out. Thousands of men, women, and children have been massacred while trying to flee to Thailand.*

Even more disturbing has been the introduction of chemical and biological warfare into Laos by Vietnam. There is overwhelming evidence that since 1975 Vietnam has used not only napalm, but also a mysterious new poison gas against civilians in Laos. This gas, identified by both the United States Department of State and private researchers as containing mycotoxin, is popularly referred to as "yellow rain." The most important aspect of the "yellow rain" phenomenon is not the legal—its use clearly violates the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning chemical warfare—but the moral. "Yellow rain" is being used as a new, efficient method of exterminating not only guerrillas but also civilians *en masse*.

The U.S. State Department received reports of 6,504 deaths directly resulting from exposure to chemical agents in Laos between the summer of 1975 and January 1982. This figure has not been broken down into armed combatants and civilians, but since the attacks are frequently against entire villages and groups of would-be escapees, the percentage of civilians killed must be quite high. And the figure does not indicate total deaths, since it is based only on eyewitness reports received. A private researcher, Sterling Seagrave, believes that by the fall of 1979, between 15,000 and 20,000 Hmong had died from the biochemical gas attacks.† The number killed up until the present is obviously much higher. In the wake of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea in 1978, numerous reports of biochemical gas attacks began to emanate from there as well. Reports of victims' symptoms were identical in both countries.

Confronted with these charges, Hanoi's representatives first dismissed them as "slander." Lately, however, they have tried to divert attention from the issue by denouncing the United States' past use of defoliants like Agent Orange in Vietnam's forests, and by inviting to Hanoi carefully

* See, apart from Barry Wain's book, Jane Hamilton-Merritt, "Flight From Laos," New York *Times*, September 4, 1979.

† *Yellow Rain: A Journey through the Terror of Chemical Warfare* (Evans, 1981). See the review of this book by Jeffrey Marsh in the March 1982 COMMENTARY.

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selected groups of sympathetic American veterans of the Vietnam war to discuss the effects of Agent Orange and ways in which the U.S. might atone for its past sins. The ploy has worked perfectly. I know of not one member of the American anti-war movement, including prize-winning biologists and chemists, who has publicly denounced the Hanoi regime for using these poisons. Some, such as Matthew Meselson of Harvard, have attempted to discredit the "yellow rain" evidence (although Meselson now seems to have abandoned his earlier position). Once again, Hanoi has quite literally got away with murder.

VI

TODAY, as Vietnam rests securely within the Soviet bloc, one may wonder how anybody could have thought that the Vietnamese Communists were using "Communist means for nationalist ends." Indeed, long before the alignment with the Soviet Union became public there was plenty of evidence of Vietnamese Communism's "internationalist" goals. The doctrinal writings of Vietnam's Communist leaders explicitly state that the party's foreign-policy objectives consist not merely of eliminating "imperialist" (i.e., U.S.) influence over their own country, but also of participating in a global offensive—the "world revolution." Thus the Communist party's first secretary, Le Duan, wrote in 1970:

> Our people are infinitely proud to stand in the forefront of the revolutionary battle fought by the world's peoples against imperialism, mankind's most dangerous enemy. . . . Ever since our party's foundation, solidarity with the international proletariat and with the revolution in the colonial and the semi-colonial countries has been a most important obligation and a basic principle for our party. . . . Thus we have won greater support and assistance from the world revolutionary movement, our people have acquired the noble sentiments of proletarian internationalism, and have guarded themselves from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism. . . . Our internationalist line has encouraged our people to contribute actively to the revolutionary struggles of the world's peoples.

That is why Vietnam today is not only colonizing Kampuchea and Laos, but also training Communist guerrillas from Thailand, and using its stockpile of American arms to supply Communist guerrillas in El Salvador.

The thesis of "Communist means for nationalist ends" was flawed not only in its failure to recognize Vietnamese Communist "internationalism." It was even more seriously defective in that it ignored the domestic policy objectives of the party. A movement which uses "Communist means" (presumably, party organization and political tactics) for "nationalist ends" is not a Communist movement. For Communists, political commitment is not merely to a set of tactics and methods for the seizure of state power. It is also commitment to a certain type of sociopolitical order to be created *after* the seizure of power. Le Duan again: "The seizure of power is not the end of the revolution; it is only the beginning." The truth of that observation is manifested quite clearly in Vietnam today.

The Vietnamese Communist party, as we have seen, administers a totalitarian regime, whose domination of the population rests upon an all-pervasive police network, backed up by an armed militia, and upon a near monopoly over the allocation of the most basic goods and services. It is a regime which elicits loyal service from its party-state apparatuses by appealing to their most primitive material instincts—offering them economic and social privileges, and the right to engage in naked extortion.

The Vietnamese Communist regime exercises its power without any regard for the most fundamental values of the majority of its citizens, and continues to engage in overt, systematic racial discrimination against its ethnic Chinese minority. Furthermore, the regime pursues a policy of imperial aggression against its weaker neighbors, using biochemical warfare against civilian populations. It attempts to clothe its policies of naked repression at home and abroad in the farcical totalitarian rhetoric of "liberation."

That such a regime could ever have won any popular support requires explanation.

In fact, there is no solid evidence that the Communists ever possessed the support of a majority of Vietnamese—either in their war against the French or in their war against the American-backed government of South Vietnam. Vietnamese political loyalties were always highly fragmented. Any explanation of the success of Vietnamese Communism would have to take account of that fragmentation, as well as of the political and moral failings of the opponents of Communism. It remains the case, however, that a necessary condition of ultimate victory was the acquisition of *some* popular support—and this in turn depended upon a strategy of political deception. Both the Vietminh and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam were organizations created for the purposes of political fraud.

The Vietminh, a front organization which the Vietnamese Communists founded in 1941, had as its ostensible goal the uniting of all persons, regardless of their particular aims, in the struggle against imperialism and colonialism. To preserve the fiction that the Vietminh was not being run by Communists for Communist aims but was rather a broad alliance of all Vietnamese nationalists, the Indochinese Communist party was formally "disbanded" in 1945—but despite the highly visible presence of non-Communists in the Vietminh, Communists or crypto-Communists really controlled the organization's policy and direction. And as Ho Chi Minh admitted later, the party itself was not disbanded but merely went under-

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ground, resurfacing in 1951 as the Vietnam Workers' party. Only after the party gained total state power in the north was the true nature of its activities revealed.

THE second stage in the successful use of the "politics of deceit" was the founding of the National Liberation Front, established by the Vietnamese Communists in 1960 to mobilize mass support against the government of South Vietnam. Its platform was so broad, democratic, and appealing that most social groups could find something in it. But like the platform of the Vietminh, which promised freedom, equality, and economic justice for all, the NLF platform was a fraud, to be discarded upon the seizure of power in 1975.

As Truong Nhu Tang, a former NLF and Provisional Revolutionary Government minister, summarized his own experience:

> The Communists are experts in the arts of seduction and will go to any length to woo you over to their side, so long as they don't control the government. But once they are in power they suddenly become harsh, ungrateful, cynical, and brutal.

The Communist strategy of deception was aimed not only at the local population but also at Western public opinion. And its success there was considerable. In the early years of American involvement in Vietnam, domestic intellectual opposition to that involvement fed upon the illusion that the National Liberation Front was not a tool of Hanoi as the State Department claimed, but rather a spontaneous and independent reaction to "U.S.-backed repression." Thus, the influential book of George M. Kahin and John Wilson Lewis, *The United States and Vietnam* (1967), reaches

> . . . the inescapable conclusion that the Liberation Front is not "Hanoi's creation"; it has manifested independence and it is southern. Insurrectionary activity against the Saigon government began in the south under southern leadership not as a consequence of any dictate from Hanoi, but contrary to Hanoi's injunctions.

Later, when Hanoi's domination of the NLF became obvious to many, it was the Communists themselves who began to be sanitized in Western intellectual opinion. When Ho Chi Minh died, the New York *Times* eulogized him in an editorial:

> Ho Chi Minh was a formidable foe who might have been a friend if this country had been more consistently faithful to some of its noblest principles, which he admired. . . . Ho turned to Communism as a means—not an end—to achieve his lifelong goal of freedom and unity for his homeland.

One of the *Times'* most famous correspondents, David Halberstam, raised the level of adulation to a pitch of pure hero worship:

> The higher he rose, the simpler and purer Ho seemed, always retaining the eternal Vietnamese values: respect for old people, disdain for money, affection for children. . . .
>
> With Ho's death, power was transferred in Hanoi without any crisis; his goals had always been his people's goals, so there was no readjustment of his vision to be made. Judged by his impact on his own poor country, his life was an extraordinary success and a vindication; he was the greatest patriot of his people in this century.*

It was not just Ho who supposedly embodied his people's hopes and aspirations. According to Frances FitzGerald, the kind of society the Communists wanted to create was at one with traditional Vietnamese values; hence, it was a society in which all the people would be able to take part:

> Instead of merely trying to renew an elitist system [the NLF] was attempting to change that system and to bring the common people, the "children," to participate in the affairs of state.†

The authors of these words were not Communists, or members of some fanatical radical sect. They were representatives of the mainstream of American liberal opinion in the period of the late 60's and early 70's. That such nonsense was not merely tolerated, but rewarded with Pulitzer prizes and other honors, suggests the extent to which the Vietnamese Communists had "captured" American intellectuals prior to 1975, just as they had "captured" the French intellectuals prior to 1954.

It is now abundantly clear that the heroic image of the Vietnamese Communist revolution was a figment of the Western romantic imagination. French intellectuals have admitted as much. To the degree that American intellectuals have not, but maintain a near-universal silence at the atrocities of Hanoi, they perpetuate a certain complicity in the suffering of the peoples of Indochina.

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* *Ho* (Random House, 1971) pp. 14, 117.

† Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake* (Little, Brown, 1972), p. 211.

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Boredom

Robert Nisbet

AMONG THE forces that have shaped human behavior boredom is one of the most insistent and universal. Although scarcely as measurable a factor in history as war, disease, economic depression, famine, and revolution, it is far from invisible in either the present or the past. A stream of chronicles, diaries, memoirs, and biographies yields much information on attacks of boredom and their consequences as well as on antidotes or preventives. Suetonius, Petronius Arbiter, Robert Burton, Saint-Simon at the Court of Louis XIV, and the Marquis de Sade are among those who left observations, reflections, and analyses of boredom. The range of cures or terminations of boredom is a wide one: migration, desertion, war, revolution, murder, calculated cruelty to others, suicide, pornography, alcohol, narcotics. Whether it is Tiberius relishing those he tortured, or Sherlock Holmes taking to the needle, the pains and the results of boredom are everywhere to be seen, and nowhere more epidemically than in Western society at the present time.

Man is apparently unique in his capacity for boredom. We share with all forms of life periodic apathy, but apathy and boredom are different. Apathy is a depressed immobility that can come upon the organism, whether amoeba or man, when the environment can no longer be adequately assimilated by the nervous system, when the normal signals are either too faint or too conflicting. It is a kind of withdrawal from the consciousness. Once sunk in apathy, the organism is inert and remains so until external stimulus jars it loose or else death ensues.

Boredom is much farther up the scale of afflictions than is apathy, and it is probable that only a nervous system as highly developed as man's is even capable of boredom. And within the human species, a level of mentality at least "normal" appears to be a requirement. The moron may know apathy but not boredom. Work of the mindlessly repetitive kind, which is perfectly acceptable to the moron, all else being equal, quickly induces boredom in the normally intelligent worker.

Work, more or less properly attuned to the worker's aptitudes, is undoubtedly the best defense against boredom. As Denis Gabor emphasized, work is the only visible activity to which man may be safely left. Keynes observed: "If the economic problem is solved, mankind will be deprived of its traditional purpose. Will this be a benefit? If one believes at all in the real values of life, the prospect at least opens up the possibility of benefit. Yet I think with dread of the readjustment of habits and instincts of the ordinary man, bred into him for countless generations, which he may be asked to discard within a few decades."

There have been workless strata before in the history of society. Think only of the half-million in imperial Rome on bread and circuses out of a total of two million people. The results were unsalutary, to say the least, and Toynbee gave this "internal proletariat," with its bored restlessness, its unproductivity, and its rising resentment of the government that fed it, credit for being, along with the "external proletariat" or invading barbarians, one of the two key causes of the eventual collapse of the Western Roman empire. In the modern day, chronic joblessness, especially among youth but in other strata as well, not overlooking the retired elderly, produces its baneful results, ranging from the mindless violence of youth on the streets to the millions of elderly who, jobless and also functionless, lapse into boredom which all too often becomes apathy and depression.

As Gabor further observed, man's central nervous system evolved over millions of years, during which alertness, vigilance, and aggressiveness were necessary to survival. Being necessary, these traits were bound to enter the very essence of man's nervous system. If, as is widely assumed by biologists, few if any significant organic changes have taken place during the past five thousand years, there is certain to be something of a traumatic effect on most people from enforced idleness, unwonted leisure, security from predators, or relative abundance of food. Boredom is in sum a response of the human brain to conditions alien to its long formation.

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SATIETY is doubtless a key element in boredom. Someone has written that the only thing worse in life than not getting any of what one has struggled for is to get all of it. Boredom is almost certainly the secret canker in utopias, as Schopenhauer warned. B. F. Skinner seemed to think that positive reinforcement would ward off all social ills, but he forgot about boredom with perfect freedom and virtue. Orwell did not forget, and his people stay content and passive only through endless gin. Aldous Huxley, for all his utopians' built-in, genetically formed safeguards, nevertheless provided them with abundant supplies of the drug Soma to raise the spirits of the depressed or bored. In sum, utopians too can lead "lives of quiet desperation."

Boredom resembles authority in one respect. The closer and more confined the setting, the greater the pain to the victim. The worst of tyrannies exist within the intimacies of life, and the same holds for life's boredoms. The very closeness of the relationship gives added poignancy to the individual sentiments or emotions aroused. If one had to choose between absolute despotism in a large country or a small, the former is to be preferred. Its very size makes possible interstices in the net of power which are unlikely in a small tyranny. Similarly, nothing bores like the small group, the intimate relation from which one has become in some degree estranged yet to which one is still bound and confined. There is a large literature on the intolerable boredom generated by small towns where public opinion has a thousand eyes and ears, or by jobs whose monotony leads to mental breakdown, drugs, and drunkenness. One shudders at the thought of the boredom induced on the farms of America in the 19th century, especially on the endless flat plains of the Middle West. Cabin fever, as boredom is known colloquially, comes from being pent up for long winters without recreation or even work.

Of all the primary relationships, marriage is probably the most fertile in its yield of boredom, to wife perhaps more than to husband if only because, prior to recent times, her opportunities to forestall or relieve boredom were fewer. There is another side to this, however, and the recent evolution of the Western family is pertinent. In very large degree, as a result of the industrial revolution and the transfer of economic functions once embedded in the family alone to other institutions, the family has largely ceased to be the micro-economy it once was, with each member holding occupational as well as kinship role. By loss of its ancient economic foundations the family has become almost entirely a purely personal relationship. In marriage, this can and does make for closer, more intimate personal relationships of love than were perhaps possible in a domestic economy. But such intimacy of personal relationship, unrelieved by economic functions, by prescribed and necessary roles of provider and homemaker, can also—and it plainly does—multiply the sources of tension, of conflict, and of the onset of paralyzing boredom of mate with mate. Again, work or division of work, mandatory work, can be salutary when personal bliss has been succeeded by personal tension and ennui. Quite possibly God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden and into the perilous unknown as a way of warding off the boredom that might have come with marriage-in-utopia and perhaps fruitlessness.

Being educated, being an intellectual, does not insulate one from feelings of monotony, tedium, and satiety. Doubtless Hamlet, "sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought" and finding "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable . . . all the uses of this world," is the heroic example of this. The Marquis de Sade considered himself an intellectual, a *philosophe* committed to revolution, and he has left some respectable writings on political and social matters. But he is nevertheless the source of the word *sadism*, and his vignettes of the exercise of sustained torment and cruelty, saturated by sexual perversion, are unmatched in modern times. Those vignettes are his recipes for release from satiety and the torment of tedium.

ALTHOUGH the net effects of boredom in history are probably malign, good has also been served by this state of mind. Many an evil dogma, doctrine, or other intellectual continuity has in the end been undone, not by assault, but by boredom on the part of its victims. A secret weapon against the Soviet Union and the Marxist-Leninist creed is the stupefying boredom that this creed induces in the minds of the second and third generations brought up under it. In all probability boredom was what ended the dreadful witchcraft craze in the 17th century. Certainly the leading lights of the day, most of whom believed as ardently as any peasant in the witches and in the necessity of their destruction, did little if anything to stop the practice. It was not, in short, legal, moral, or religious argument but sheer boredom with the spectacle that won out. "When you've seen one burn, you've seen them all" might well have become in time the saving thought. It is boredom above anything else that brings literary continuities to a welcome end. The public is grateful for Milton, but deplores the Miltonians. So it is with the ascendancy of political parties: the more powerful a party-in-office becomes, the greater the boredom it produces in the public mind.

The sense of emptiness of life is pronounced in almost any onset of boredom. Samuel Johnson, for all his prodigious expenditures of energy, was in almost constant dread of what he called the "vacuity of life." Second only to his fear of the disease of envy was his fear of the psychic affliction under which one sees everything as meaningless, futile, or superfluous. In *Rasselas* the pyramids of

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Egypt are described as monuments of royal boredom, constructed from the torment of thousands of workers over protracted periods for the purpose of relieving the pharaonic burden of satiety.

Enforced separation from a cherished vocation is a sure recipe for boredom. Much damage was done upon the public weal in ancient Rome when the legionaries were temporarily out of war, chafing to get back to work, making the civil population feel their enforced idleness cum boredom. The knights of the Middle Ages were more dangerous to society when they were not in combat, for the onset of boredom at home could be formidable, its toll commencing with the knight's own wife and children. Ghastly though the American Civil War became in its unending slaughter and epidemic disease, there was no end to the lines of young men fleeing the deadly monotony of farm and village for enlistment under one banner or the other. Boredom even within combat circumstances can drive field soldiers as well as officers into tactics or individual acts bound to yield a heavy harvest of fatalities. Stupidity should not be taken away from the generals of World War I, on both sides, for their appalling movements of vast armies over a few hundred yards of terrain; but neither should one forget the inevitable, galling tedium of trench existence. In sum, war can engender as well as give release from boredom.

THERE is a history as well as a sociology of boredom. It must surely have been first felt by man when he made the transition some twenty thousand years ago from a hunting or pastoral existence to village life and the tyrannies of soil and season. It is one thing to be mobile, in constant search for security and food. It was something else to face the sheer drudgery of tilling and harvesting and the monotony of life in the village. The word *paradise* comes from the Persian, where originally it meant "wilderness," and there is no doubt a lesson there.

Very probably play came into existence as an anodyne to the tedium of life. *Homo ludens* spelled *homo faber*. The principal function of ritual in primitive society, it has been suggested by anthropologists, is to prevent boredom. Ritual punctuates the long and dreary sameness of life. Calendars began, indeed, in the listing and timing of rites and feast-days. Through history and among all peoples religion generally has been a major antidote to what would otherwise be the sense of world-weariness, of passive indifference to life, in a great many minds. The religious "awakenings" which fill the history of religion in the West since the late Middle Ages have their roots, in some degree at least, in the desire for ecstatic release from tedium. Life on the agricultural frontier in the United States could be grim indeed in its relentless tedium, and along with religious enthusiasm, a desperate desire to escape this tedium lay behind the innumerable revivalist camp meetings of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of these meetings could be orgiastic on occasion, and a special kind of forgiveness went to those in the backwoods and on the prairies whose occasional evangelical writhings sometimes included unpremeditated copulation in the environs of the revival tent. The very word *revival* suggests that psychological as well as religious inspiration was sought and given.

As for the future of boredom, Harlow Shapley ranked boredom third in a list of possible causes of the destruction of civilization, a list that included nuclear war, natural catastrophe, and pandemic disease. Bertrand Russell concluded: "If life is to be saved from boredom relieved only by disaster, means must be found of restoring individual initiative not only in things that are trivial but in the things that really matter." One may agree with Russell, but without real hope that such restoration is likely in contemporary society. The modern state through its centralization of power has destroyed or eroded away too many of the historic social contexts of initiative in "things that really matter." Modern technology and industry, for all their benefits to mankind, by their very nature leave more and more people as spectators and mere consumers. Even the demographic foundations of America promise an increase in boredom, for the aging of the population is, short of catastrophe, assured for a long time to come, and old age is a natural prey of boredom, all the folksy retirement centers and organized tours notwithstanding. Durkheim, Freud, and a few others in the late 19th century saw unhappiness as positively correlated with the advance of civilization, and their visions of the future were generally pessimistic. Boredom may become Western man's greatest source of unhappiness. Catastrophe alone would appear to be the surest and, in today's world, the most likely of liberations from boredom. If catastrophe has a runner-up in the probability tables, it is a worldwide religious awakening of vast proportions. Faint signs of this exist at the present moment.

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Our Egalitarian Economists

Melville J. Ulmer

OVER the last half-century, the dominant politico-economic movement of the industrialized democratic world has been a drive toward the equalization of incomes. With its roots in the mid-1800's, the movement gained strength in the 1930's and burgeoned brightly in the decades after World War II. Today in the United States, beneath all the hazy gabble about interest rates, money, deficits, and entitlements, this "push to equality," as some have termed it, remains the fundamental political issue. It accounts for the fact that on the Left, Ronald Reagan is the most widely hated man since Senator Joseph McCarthy, leaving Richard Nixon in a modest third place. For Reagan is without doubt the first President in history to confront the drive toward leveling, openly and explicitly, and to attempt to reverse it.

Equality and freedom, of course, have been the cornerstones of democracy through the ages, but when the former is made synonymous with income leveling the two become uneasy companions. Thirty years ago, to the consternation of his liberal colleagues, Bertrand de Jouvenel contended in *The Ethics of Redistribution* that redistribution "conspires to push the individual in the fold (in a uniform mold) under the protection of the state." Although temporarily disconcerting, his argument was meticulously interred in subsequent years by more fashionable reformers on the other side. Recently, and with the helpful benefits of hindsight, the argument has resurfaced. Today it deals not so much with the extremes of income distribution that concerned Jouvenel—perfect equality and unlimited inequality—but with a more immediate and practical question: at what point should the presently evolving redistributive trend be arrested; or, if reversed, at what point should it come to rest? No doubt, that implicit question will and should sway more than a few votes in the congressional contests now in the offing, as it did in the election of 1980 and as it did in the tax-revolt referendums a few years before.

As for the emotions stirred in leftward-leaning circles, the evidence can hardly be avoided: in cartoons, essays, speeches, and TV discourse, the President appears as the administrator of "government by and for the rich" (Edward M. Kennedy), as whip-wielding slave driver (Herblock), gluttonous monster (Szep), "apostle of naked avarice" (Robert Lekachman), and "sacrificer of the powerless on the altar of the wealthy" (Stephen Rousseas).

The substance underlying this response is not as clear as the response itself, for despite the "brutal cuts" perceived by the Washington *Post* and the New York *Times*, the cold statistical facts show that federal outlays for welfare, including income maintenance and public health, have continued steadily upward—from $248 billion in fiscal year 1980 to $291 billion in 1981 and an estimated $323 billion in 1982. The last figure is more than 70 percent greater than the presumably bloated 1982 budget for national defense.

True, some welfare programs considered less effective, like the notoriously sloppy Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), have been contracted sharply, but then others designed to help the poor and unemployed have risen even more. Alterations in eligibility requirements have indeed penalized some beneficiaries, like "students" who carefully collected federal "loans" while even more carefully never attending school, but others have obviously benefited. A recent example is the "summer meals" program of New York City's Board of Education, which served 200,000 meals daily this past summer against half that number in 1981, despite tightened federal regulations which were supposed to lead to "dangerous" deprivation. In the aggregate, as the data show, the winners in the quest for welfare funds have outweighed the losers.

Nor has evidence appeared as yet that the distribution of income has been significantly altered in favor of the rich since the present administration took office. Corporation profits plunged from $183 billion in 1980 to $140 billion (at an annual rate) in the first half of 1982, in the face of a rising price level over this same period. Although spreading unemployment was a well dispersed disaster as the economy declined, total wages and salaries continued their advance from $1,600 billion in 1980 to $1,850 billion (at an annual rate) in the first six

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months of 1982. The share in the national income of property receipts in general—including profits, interest, rent, and royalties—dropped from 25 to 23 percent over that period. Welfare payments, which are not counted as part of the national income, ballooned (as I have already noted). A lone hopeful note for business was a significant drop in the pace of inflation. In all, the picture was hardly the dream of the world's greediest capitalists come true.

It would seem, then, that the fury against Reagan on the Left is caused not by his deeds but by his expressed *intention* to halt the growth in programs aimed at siphoning income from the richer to the poorer.

Aside from proposed cuts in welfare, which are still to be won over Democratic protests, the principal symbol of this intention, and a prime target of liberal fire, has been the three-stage 23-percent reduction in personal income-tax rates included in the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, the final installment of which is due next year. That tax cut was "across the board," meaning that it applied equally, at least in relative terms, to all levels of income. For liberals, especially those with intellectual credentials, it was received as an insolent rejection of a gentleman's agreement, a loutish break in the precepts of the "good society." In the past, tax changes had been formulated to yield greater impact on upper-income groups when taxes were increased, and greater impact on those at the opposite end of the scale when they were reduced. Together with the steadily rising "bracket creep," the effect was expected to intensify the progressivity of the income-tax schedule, and it did so sharply.

Between 1960 and 1980, marginal tax rates for middle- and upper-income classes flourished like crocuses in springtime, increasing the tax burden for many by as much as 50 percent, despite unchanged real incomes. Added to this was the explosion of direct benefits for the poor, succinctly summarized by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.:

> Since 1970, Medicare and Medicaid have grown 436 percent. Through the 1970's, welfare programs grew 2½ times as fast as the GNP and three times as fast as wages. Between 1970 and 1980, real spending per individual poverty client grew 82 percent, not counting increases in Social Security, Medicare, and federal employee retirement programs.

By all available standards, the conclusion seems inescapable that the push to equality made giant strides. One might imagine that liberals were smiling, at least until the election returns of November 1980. But the opposite was true. The liberals' disappointment remained just as fixed, their frustrated compassion for the indigent just as flamboyantly displayed. In their eyes the push to equality was a mirage, while the future loomed as a nightmare.

This judgment was especially influential when emanating from the Democratic party's two leading economic advisers, MIT's Lester Thurow and Yale's James Tobin. Thurow's considered conclusion, repeated relentlessly over the past decade, is that notwithstanding all the spreading paraphernalia of the welfare state, the distribution of income among American families has remained approximately fixed since the end of World War II. As he sees it, the widely publicized welfare programs have simply succeeded in keeping the distribution of income from growing more unequal. Indeed, Thurow predicts that even this service will subside and "the distribution of family income will start moving toward inequality in the 1980's and 1990's"—unless, of course, his own stronger egalitarian prescriptions are adopted.*

To all this, Tobin adds a philosophical contribution. Like the late Arthur Okun, his predecessor as adviser to the Democratic party, he finds on both economic and moral grounds a "strong presumption" for perfect equality in income distribution, limited only by sufficient incentive differentials to keep the economy going.† That same presumption, not always so openly expressed, seems to underlie the calls for "reform" stirring in such radicals as Michael Parenti, E. K. Hunt, Howard J. Sherman, Frank Ackerman, and Andrew Zimbalist.

WE SHALL return to the normative proposition of Tobin and Okun, but demanding attention first are the astonishing assertions about the past. How can Thurow contend that income distribution has remained substantially unchanged in the United States over the last thirty years, against an almost unanimous public conviction to the contrary? Answer: by painstakingly ignoring the relevant data. Thurow uses official Census Bureau statistics clearly labeled by the bureau "Distribution of Money Income Among U.S. Families." But this tabulation, as the Census makes no effort to conceal, shows the money income received by families, poor and rich alike, *before* payment of income taxes. It also excludes *non*-money income provided by government, such as outlays for Medicaid, food stamps, housing, and other so-called in-kind benefits for the poor. In addition, it inadvertently excludes a significant part of the *cash* transfers to the poor, which the bureau acknowledges are systematically understated in its data.

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* See, for example, his *The Zero Sum Society* (Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 156-157, and (with Robert L. Heilbroner), *The Economic Problem* (Prentice Hall, fourth edition, 1975), p. 245.

† "Considerations Regarding Taxation and Inequality," in Colin D. Campbell (ed.), *Income Redistribution* (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), pp. 130 and 170. Okun's most complete exposition of the subject appears in his *Equality and Efficiency: The Big Tradeoff* (Brookings Institution, 1975).

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In short, Thurow demonstrates that welfare benefits and progressive taxes have no effect on "income distribution" by carefully using data which effectively omit their impact.

Fortunately, there are other economists who feel politically and morally free to use *any* data, if informative. In a well-known study published six year ago, Edgar K. Browning mended the Census tabulation on income distribution, at least in part, by taking account of income in kind and the influence of personal income taxes.* Thurow laments that the share in total family income of the poorest fifth of the population was only around 5 percent in the 1970's. Browning shows that it was about 12 percent. Thurow expresses dismay at the 42-percent share that he says accrued to the richest fifth. Browning asserts the true figure was a bit less than 33 percent. Thurow maintains that the pattern of distribution had remained stubbornly stable. Browning shows that the two key percentages since the 1950's had moved almost halfway toward perfect equality.

As one might expect, Browning's estimates did not go unchallenged by liberals. But in due time they received strong support from authoritative sources. The Census Bureau itself, for the first time this spring, took account of in-kind benefits and conceded that its own earlier measurement of the incidence of poverty had been overstated by half. A path-breaking study by Patricia Ruggles of the Congressional Budget Office and the British economist Michael O'Higgins estimates the flow of all government services, benefits, outlays, and taxes to and from households, classified by income size, with results consistent with Browning's.† And a group of Harvard economists is at present probing the influence of changes in the age distribution of the population, a factor heretofore entirely neglected. Over the last two decades the proportion in the total population of young adults and the elderly has risen. Since maximum lifetime earnings normally occur in the middle years, this demographic change in itself provides a spurious appearance of increasing inequality. In fact, as all these studies demonstrate, by the start of the 1980's an enormous push to equality had occurred, even greater than that suggested by Browning's estimates.

How much farther should redistribution proceed, if at all? Six years ago Browning answered, "It may be that we have gone far enough." By 1980, judging from the rhetoric of Republican candidates and the election returns of November, it was clear that many voters believed it had gone too far. But these many voters certainly did not include the more firmly devoted liberals and their professional leaders. When asked how much equality is needed, they faithfully join with Robert Lekachman in answering "More!" Consciously or not, the aim is toward the goal of perfect equality, heartened by the academic sanction that ancient socialist dream has been accorded in the works of Okun and Tobin.

Fundamentally, Okun rests his philosophical case on the principle of human rights—a *right* to all the prerogatives that money provides. Tobin for his part stresses the democratic right to equal opportunity, which he says cannot be exercised in the presence of "inequality of wealth." "Human beings are human beings," he intones, which is beyond dispute except when coupled with his assumption that we are all the same but for a purely fortuitous distribution of talents—strictly called "endowments" in his essays. Inexplicably missing in such discussions—including the popular egalitarian treatise of the Harvard philosopher John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*—is Jouvenel's argument for personal freedom.

Jouvenel's classic work, *The Ethics of Redistribution*, is now thirty years old and it would be remarkable if experience since then had not sharpened our focus on the issues involved. Jouvenel properly underscores the inescapable growth of a coercive state under an egalitarian rule. But he scarcely mentions the coordinate peril to individuality, which he must have assumed is obvious. Reading some of today's liberals one must conclude that it is not so obvious. The starkest evidence is in Tobin's view of economic outcomes as arising from a purely random distribution of aptitudes and skills—genetic seeds fatefully scattered among the populace and ineluctably destined to determine who will be rich or poor. No role is allowed in this scheme for variations in the degree of concentrated effort, fortitude, self-indulgence, discipline, indolence, forbearance, or motivation that an individual may or may not bring to his native gifts. In Tobin's credo it is mostly automatic, except for the play of Lady Luck and the influence of inherited money.** If a child has exceptionally long, dexterous fingers and a preternaturally sensitive ear, we will be blessed with a Horowitz or a Rubinstein. The child with a sufficiently rare gift for words inevitably grows up to become a Hemingway or a Willa Cather.

Neglected above all in the Tobin-Okun thesis is the democratic right of the individual, whatever his aptitudes, to pursue the kind of life he chooses, provided the rights of others to do likewise are respected. Shall the individual who cherishes material things, and works and saves for them, be forced to share with the nature lover who by choice lives

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* "How Much More Equality Can We Afford?" *Public Interest*, Spring 1976.

† "The Distribution of Public Expenditure Among Households in the United States," *Review of Income and Wealth*, June 1981.

** In this, both Tobin and Okun are seconded by Christopher Jencks, who in *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effects of Family and Schooling in America* (1972) argued that mere chance rather than merit accounts for many of today's inequalities.

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simply and labors only when required? Shall the risk-taker who wins be forced to share with the risk-averter who winds up in modest circumstances? Shall a family that stints and saves for the security of later years be forced to share with profligates who lust for each passing fancy as they go along? Must the conscientious and forbearing share with the careless and the indolent? Those who side with Tobin, Okun, *et al.* would have to answer, Yes.

The norms of modern civilization should make it unnecessary to affirm society's obligation to care for its infirm, disabled, elderly, and indigent mothers of toddlers. Many would also agree that it has an obligation to guarantee—not full employment, which is impossible, but a reasonable *opportunity* to find and hold a job for all capable of contributing. But the notion of income equality, no matter how abstract and idealized, is a formula for regimentation. In theory it is destructive of the relationship between democracy and the individual's fundamental right to be different, and in practice it has spawned a tawdry culture of dependency, the immense cost of which underlies most of the economic problems of the Western world.

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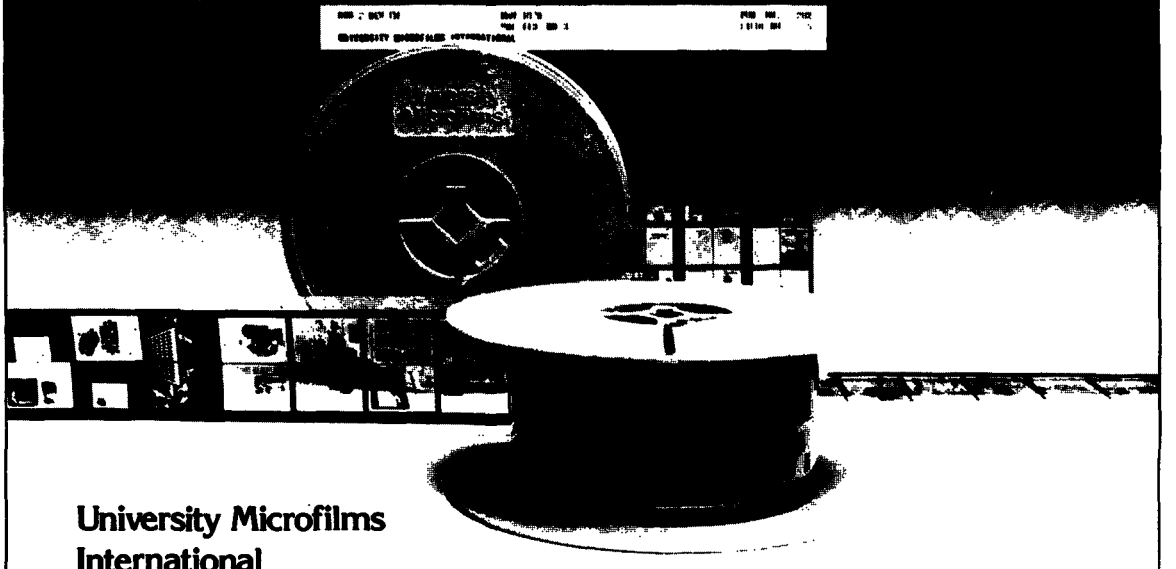

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Thinking About the Self

Michael Levin

It is hardly news that in recent years Americans have indulged in a perhaps unprecedented preoccupation with the care and feeding of the self, from courses in assertiveness training to articles like the one in a leading women's magazine, "Nineteen Ways to be Uniquely Yourself." Tom Wolfe's term for the 70's, the "Me Decade," has even entered the language as a catch-all tag for this era of self-consciousness.

Indeed, the new subjectivity may help to explain the otherwise puzzling popularity of a spate of forbiddingly hefty books that have recently appeared on the abstruse *philosophical* topics of self-reference and self-consciousness. The first and least consequential of these, Raymond Smullyan's *What Is the Name of This Book?*, was published in 1978. In 1979 came Douglas Hofstadter's 777-page *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid,* which won a Pulitzer Prize and has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. In 1981, Robert Nozick's 750-page *Philosophical Explanations* was ushered forth amid much hoopla. Concurrently, Douglas Hofstadter teamed up with Daniel Dennett —an academic philosopher who had independently developed similar ideas—to "produce and arrange" (as the subtitle has it) *The Mind's I*, at 496 pages a relatively svelte collection of stories, essays, and running commentary on themes from *Gödel, Escher, Bach. The Mind's I* has been aggressively marketed and even excerpted in *Book Digest*. This year has so far brought Morton Hunt's *The Universe Within*, more sober-sided than its predecessors but sharing many of the same concerns. Self-awareness is evidently a philosophical idea whose time has come.*

As its title suggests, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (henceforth *G.E.B.*) is about a mathematical discovery known as Gödel's Theorem and its ramifications. That, however, is like saying that *Moby-Dick* is about whales. Hofstadter's polymorphous enthusiasms embrace an enormous variety of topics, from Zen Buddhism to the proper translation of "borscht" in 19th-century Russian novels. Each major topic in the book is treated first in a Lewis Carroll-like dialogue, and then again in straightforward prose. But the connecting thread is always Gödel's Theorem, and this places heavy demands on non-specialist outsiders hoping to join the discussion.

The heart of Gödel's Theorem is a sentence that talks about itself. Many people know about this sort of self-reference—if not by that name—from a familiar conundrum: Is "This statement is false" true or false? The statement says of itself that it is not true; so if it is not true, it *is* true. Conversely, if it is true, then it is not true. Logicians generally view such blatant paradoxes as violating some rule of linguistic propriety; in 1931, however, Kurt Gödel produced a related statement which wreaks havoc with logic and mathematics without actually being deviant.

Ignoring ordinary language and confining himself to arithmetic, Gödel ingeniously assigned a specific number to every statement *about* numbers; the number assigned to any such statement is nowadays called its "Gödel number." Gödel then offered the following assertion: "The statement whose Gödel number is n cannot be proven," which, after much serpentine reasoning, turns out to have n itself as its Gödel number. Gödel's sentence thus says of itself that it is not provable. Not provable it is; were it provable it would obviously be false, and nothing false is provable. But since it is not provable, it is also *ipso facto* true. Such is Gödel's Theorem: some truths of arithmetic are unprovable. The same technique can be generalized to show that *any* system is incapable of proving some truth, and therefore that no one system encompasses all truths.

Gödel's discovery is admired by all who study it. In defining the limits of systematization, Gödel answered questions about mathematics that had been open since Euclid organized geometry 2,500 years ago. Hofstadter, however, takes Gödel's Theorem to shed light on, and even solve, a wider range of enigmas. What strikes him as most suggestive is the way the Gödel sentence, by referring to the number n via the Gödel coding, leads right back to the original sentence itself. Hofstadter calls this a "strange loop," a path which leads down through levels of a hierarchy—from sentence to number—and then back up, from number to initiating sentence. And Hofstadter finds "strange loops" everywhere. A fugal tune by Bach leads back to its starting note; Bach even wrote a fugue on the letters of his own name. Staircases drawn by the artist M.C. Escher ascend to where they start. Zen koans jump "in and out of reasoning." There is "self-reference in molecular biology" because DNA molecules produce enzymes which help the original molecule repro-

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* Raymond Smullyan, *What Is the Name of This Book?*, Prentice-Hall, 241 pp., $4.95; Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Basic Books, 777 pp., $23.00; Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, Harvard University Press, 764 pp., $25.00; Douglas Hofstadter and Daniel Dennett, *The Mind's I*, Basic Books, 496 pp., $16.95; Morton Hunt, *The Universe Within*, Simon & Schuster, 415 pp., $18.75.

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duce. Many optical illusions involve the interaction of figure and ground.

But Hofstadter is mainly concerned with using self-referential loops to solve the traditional problem of the mind: how can the brain —a purely physical thing composed of nerve cells—generate thought and consciousness? Hofstadter's answer (and Dennett's as well) is that the question is misleading. After all, we do not ask a NASA scientist how the transistors in his computer calculate an orbit. What does the calculating is the computer's program, which can be understood without any knowledge of transistors. We "chunk" the computer's underlying circuitry into larger units that perform identifiable functions (add, substract, erase) and think about the computer at the more abstract level of the relation of the chunks. Similarly, says Hofstadter, thought is not something that happens in the brain or anywhere else; it is a "global" feature of the brain's program. His guiding analogy is a colony of insentient ants who so interact that the colony as a whole can conduct a "conversation."

In this conception, the "I" as a distinct entity is replaced by the totality of systems—memory, imagination, and so on—which compose it. The self-idea each of us carries around is simply the way the totality of our mental subsystems represents itself to itself. To put the same thought in different words, the way the self-system pictures itself to itself is how the idea of a "mind" gets started.

This declension toward self-representation is a natural opening for Gödel's Theorem. It reenters the discussion when, at the climax of these speculations, Hofstadter considers the relation of the brain's "program level" to its physical, or nerve-cell, level. He proposes, à la Gödel, that the program reaches down to influence the neurons, which in turn reach up to influence the program. The two mutually determine each other. The program level, the mind, leads by a "strange loop" back to itself. It is this self-determination of the self that is the essence of consciousness and free will: "The self comes into being at the moment it has the power to reflect itself."

All this, however, is more suggestive than clarifying. In the end, Hofstadter implies, the most sophisticated computer does what it does because of its hardware. A talking anthill talks because of the way its constituent ants interact. Hofstadter thus leaves us with the prospect of "reducing" the mind to the brain after all, unless one takes far too literally the questionable idea of a program bootstrapping itself out of nothingness.

Hofstadter takes Gödel loops farther than they can go—not the first time an important but circumscribed scientific discovery has been extended beyond its original domain of application. Earlier in this century, quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity were recruited to show, respectively, that man has free will and that "everything is relative." More recently, Noam Chomsky has advertised the intricacy of English grammar as a bulwark against racism and American imperialism. What is striking about *G.E.B.*—especially given its large readership—is how clumsily it explains the discovery it celebrates. Hofstadter talks around Gödel's Theorem for hundreds of pages, then races through the hard, crucial parts in a few dense paragraphs—something the reader may not mind, since Hofstadter repeatedly assures him that "You need not worry if you don't fully grasp Gödel's Theorem by now. . . . Don't worry if you don't get it. Have fun." I doubt that anyone has actually *learned* Gödel's Theorem from *G.E.B.* The source of *G.E.B.*'s appeal seemingly lies not in what it actually communicates, but in the impression it makes and the associations it conjures up.

I cannot help comparing *G.E.B.* with the book that hooked so many of my generation on higher mathematics, George Gamow's *1, 2, 3 . . . Infinity*. *Infinity* was lively and informative without show or mannerism. It would not have occurred to us that science could be popularized in any other way.

ROBERT NOZICK's *Philosophical Explanations* is a straightforward treatise by a professor of philosophy at Harvard, distinguished by its author's explicit promise to deal with traditional philosophical questions —the nature of the self, the origin of the universe, free will, the nature of value, the meaning of life—in a quite new way. He prepares the reader for unorthodoxy by declaring that these questions are "so deep that any approach that stands a chance of yielding an answer will look extremely weird."

If Hofstadter thinks self-reference solves the problem of the mind, Nozick is prepared to push self-reference much farther—indeed, about as far as it will go. In fact, for Nozick "This statement is false" is not self-referential *enough*, depending as it does on prior linguistic conventions about the word "this." By contrast, a man who says "I am hungry" refers to himself "from the inside." My ability to refer to myself in this way, says Nozick, is not only what makes me a self, it is how I *create* myself. A self creates itself out of nothing by a primordial act of self-reference. This act decides what it means to be, and what the self so produced will be like.

Nozick continues the theme of self-creation *ex nihilo* when he asks why there is a universe instead of sheer nothingness. He says we could comprehend the answer to this question if the ultimate principles of the universe were "self-subsuming." What he means can be illustrated as follows. All the various laws of science seek to unify diverse phenomena. Those which succeed are provisionally held to be true. We can sum this up with the remark, "Every generalization which unifies diversity is true." Now, this remark is itself a generalization which unifies diversity. Were it true, the nature of reality—diverse phenomena unified by laws—would be explained by a principle that also embraces itself. This is how a true, self-subsuming principle would explain the universe in terms of itself.

Nozick offers similar perspectives on freedom and value. He rejects the idea that freedom is randomness (who wants to be controlled by a roulette wheel?), and also the idea that freedom means acting from one's own basic desires. The latter, he worries, would make us the playthings of alien forces, even if those

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forces happened to have gotten inside us: "Is it better," he asks in a rhetorical question, "to be a hand puppet than a marionette?" Nozick proposes instead that a free choice is one which chooses to make itself happen by a process of "self-subsumption." What he means is this: Every choice rests on a general policy. If you choose to take the express train, this is probably because it is your policy to get where you are going as quickly as possible. But if the decision to go by express is itself taken quickly, the decision falls under its own governing policy and "explains itself." Similarly, says Nozick, the decision to find value in the world of neutral scientific fact can subsume itself as something valuable and thereby "put itself into effect." This same "choice that there be value" is what gives life meaning.

There are a number of conspicuous shortcomings to these proposals, the chief of which is that Nozick is no more successful than Hofstadter in explaining how something can literally make itself come into existence. Intriguing as self-reference is, it is no answer. Even the Gödel sentence had to exist before it could start referring to itself. What is more, Nozick seems bent on "solving," by rather obscure appeals to self-reference, problems which are not real. This is most clear in connection with free will. Even a "self-subsuming" choice could, for all that Nozick has shown, have an external cause. Nor do we need to be rescued from having our behavior caused by our desires. The reason I would not want to be a hand puppet is, very simply, that the hand belongs to someone else; the desires that move me, by contrast, are most assuredly mine.

If many of the problems *Explanations* addresses are unreal, many real problems it simply evades. For a book that has been praised for returning philosophy from heaven to earth, it has surprisingly little to say about practical matters. The only policy issue Nozick discusses is capital punishment. A murderer is "disconnected from value" and deserves to die. Yet we who execute him destroy "intrinsic value" and risk our own connection to value. After circling this mulberry bush for a while, Nozick says he does not know what to think—the intrinsic value of innocent lives saved by deterrence having apparently slipped his mind.

One striking feature of both *Explanations* and *G.E.B.* is how completely, and evidently unconsciously, Hofstadter and Nozick confine themselves to *self*-consciousness and the nature of the *human* mind. Asks a character in one of Hofstadter's fictionalized dialogues, "Aren't you aware of your own thoughts? Isn't that the essence of consciousness?" In fact, it is not. Fish and animals are conscious, although they surely lack a sense of self. On the other hand, they do have selves—in fact, they *are* selves. A trout swimming upstream probably thinks the trout equivalent of "It's cold," although most certainly not "*I'm* cold." We and the lower animals are so similar that any account of the human self ought to apply to animals as well. In equating an understanding of consciousness with an understanding of self-consciousness, a state limited to man and possibly higher apes, Hofstadter and Nozick fail to see what is common between the mental processes of humans, and animals, and thus what is distinctive about the human mind.

The excessive concentration on self-perception becomes understandable, however, if it is seen in the context of that psychological movement with which we began the discussion. The idea that each of us is "self-actualizing," and that mental health and happiness consist in extending our self-actualization, is of course not new. The germ of it lies in existentialist philosophy, the first flower in Abraham Maslow's "Psychology of Being." In the early 1960's Eric Berne stressed the inauthenticity of acquiescing in one's faults as if they were unalterable facts of nature. More recently still, Wayne Dyer has written best-sellers about "pulling your own strings" and Werner Erhard has done well telling est seminarians that they are responsible for their states of mind.

There is of course something to these ideas, but it can be overstated. It may not do to say, "I have an abrasive personality, that's just the way I am, you'll have to accept it," but it also will not do to say that it is up to me whether to get upset if my family is killed in an airplane crash. There are limits to self-control and the empire of the will, hard though this may be to accept in a secular age which has enthroned the human will and its transient manifestations as the measure of all things. It is those limits which, in complementary ways, both the new philosophy and the "human potential" movement ignore.

But however the self came to occupy so disproportionate a place in intellectual discourse, and whatever the reason such discourse has been taken up by a large if not quite comprehending public, it is not quite sufficient to call the preoccupation simple narcissism—if only because devotees of the self work so hard at it and seem to be having so little fun. What we may be witnessing instead is an expansion of the self as the source and repository of rights. One learns nowadays that one is entitled to medical care, to a job, even to dignity, just by virtue of existing. Laws are enacted to protect these rights, and judges grow more acute in discerning them in the Constitution. You do not have to do anything to deserve these rights, you just have to be there. This intermixture of the self with stern legalism may account for the grimness of the pilgrims on today's path to self-fulfillment. For whatever else it is, enforcing a claim is not fun. (There are all those other expanding egos to contend with.)

It is little wonder that such a climate would favor a message from philosophers that, yes, our selves are not only important and real, they are *the* most important and most real thing imaginable—and that the most philosophically fascinating talk is talk that calls attention to the talker and, preferably, to the very act of talking. Thus the entitlement generation, which already depends psychologically and ethically on notions of selfhood, has now found an ontology of its very own.

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The Black Book

Joshua Rubenstein

SINCE the close of World War II, a multitude of firsthand material about the destruction of European Jewry has been published, including diaries, memoirs, and the reports of Nazi officers to their superiors in Berlin. But until recently, the slaughter of Jews on Soviet territory has not been as well documented, mainly because the Soviet government has been reluctant to acknowledge that the Jews were the primary victims of Nazi hatred. One-and-a-half million Jews were murdered by the *Einsatzgruppen,* four shooting units that followed the *Wehrmacht* into Soviet territory. Their reports were found in Nazi archives and many officers were interrogated after the war as well. But unlike what happened in Poland and Western Europe, where German documents have been supplemented by the testimony of survivors, we have few if any accounts from the side of the victims in the enormous area of Soviet territory which was occupied by the Germans.

This serious gap has now been addressed by the publication of *The Black Book.** Like many manuscripts to reach us from the Soviet Union, this one has a long and complicated history. The present volume was prepared at Yad Vashem (Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority) in Jerusalem, but it represents the work of more than forty writers and journalists who, from 1944 to 1946, collected and prepared material on the destruction of Soviet Jewry. Excerpts were published in the Moscow journal *Znamya* (*The Banner*) as long ago as 1944, with a preface by the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg. Two sections of the book in Yiddish translation also appeared in Moscow by 1945, again with prefaces by Ehrenburg. In 1946, a much longer section was published in Rumania.

That same year, Ehrenburg traveled to the United States and showed parts of the manuscript to Albert Einstein. He also gave a good deal of firsthand material to a committee in New York. This committee issued a "Black Book" in 1946 which contained eyewitness testimony about Nazi atrocities throughout Europe, but there was no indication of what *The Black Book* really was, of its ambitious scale, of how the testimonies were collected, or of what happened to the documents that Ehrenburg gave the committee in New York. (According to B. Z. Goldberg, a prominent Yiddish journalist in New York who for many years had been outspokenly pro-Soviet, Albert Einstein wrote a preface for the book, but it was rejected by American participants in the committee because it had a "Zionist angle.") The present volume is based on a Russian-language manuscript that the Yiddish poet Abram Sutskever delivered to Yad Vashem in 1965.

More serious obstacles to publication intruded in the Soviet Union itself. In Ehrenburg's memoirs, *People, Years, Life,* which began appearing in 1961 in the liberal Moscow journal *Novy Mir* (*New World*), he mentioned *The Black Book,* which he had edited with another journalist named Vasily Grossman, and told how the regime had prevented its appearance after the war. What readers of the memoirs did not know was that Ehrenburg had written much more extensively about *The Black Book,* but the censors insisted he remove most of it.

ILYA EHRENBURG was one of the most controversial and contradictory figures in Soviet literary history. A Jew, he was an avowed assimilationist who voiced little support for Zionism or Israel. He lived and traveled widely abroad, an unusual circumstance for a Soviet citizen. He survived the Stalin years when many of his friends and colleagues—writers, veterans of the Spanish Civil War, and Jews—were cut down.

Because of his contacts and the many years he spent living in the West, Ehrenburg was extremely useful to Stalin in the decades before and after World War II. In the 1930's, he helped to organize the International Writers' Congress for the Defense of Culture which took place in Paris in June 1935. Along with other Soviet apologists, he tried to prevent discussion of the fate of Victor Serge, a revolutionary anarchist who was then under arrest in the Soviet Union. (In his memoirs, Serge later referred to Ehrenburg as a "hack agitator-novelist.")

After the war, too, Ehrenburg spent time in the West, this time as the architect and principal spokesman for the Soviet-sponsored "struggle for peace" campaign. He traveled all over the world, extolling Stalin's foreign policy and his peaceful intentions—at a time when the Red Army was consolidating control of Eastern Europe and Soviet scientists were laboring to overcome the U.S. monopoly of atomic weapons. The Russian émigré writer Roman Gul wrote about Ehrenburg during this period that his principal "line of business was to lie to the West about Russia, and in Russia to lie to the Soviet people about the West. Because the regime is faced with a catastrophic lack of knowledgeable and intelligent people who know the West, they have no one for this role other than Ehrenburg."

Ehrenburg's service to the Soviet regime during these years takes on a particularly sinister dimension when we remember that they coincided with Stalin's assault on Soviet Jewry. At the height of the anti-Semitic hysteria, when prominent Jews were unmasked and denounced as "cosmopolitans," when more than a score of Yiddish writers were secretly executed, and when Jewish doctors were accused of attempting to poison the Kremlin leaders, Ehrenburg survived and could even be said to have flourished. He later wrote in his memoirs that this period was among "the most painful in my whole life." We know

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* Edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, translated from the Russian by John Glad and James S. Levine, Holocaust Library/Schocken, 595 pp., $19.95, $9.95 (paper).

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now that he also feared arrest, and that he objected to Stalin's plan to deport the Jews of European Russia to Siberia. No one can say for certain why Ehrenburg survived, but there is no denying his usefulness to the regime as an informed and quick-witted spokesman in the West, a role Stalin depended on to help maintain the duplicitous nature of his dictatorship.

DURING World War II, Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman both worked for the army newspaper *Red Star*, which gave them unique visibility and prestige. "Never in my life have I worked so hard," Ehrenburg wrote in *People, Years, Life*. "Every day I wrote three or four articles; at home I sat at my typewriter, in the evening I went to the *Red Star* office, prepared an article for the next issue, read German documents and intercepted radio messages, edited translations and wrote captions for photographers."

As the war continued and the scope of Nazi atrocities became clearer, Ehrenburg actively sought out material on the destruction of Soviet Jewry, asking the soldiers to send him eyewitness accounts. In the midst of all this work, he planned to compile three volumes about the Jews and the war: a black book on Jewish suffering; a red book on the exploits of Jewish soldiers; and a yellow book on Jewish partisans.

For a time he must have had good reason to think his project would succeed. The Soviet Union needed allies, so Stalin had allowed the formation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to reinforce the support of Western Jews for the wartime alliance. Ehrenburg was a member of the committee; the Yiddish theater director Solomon Mikhoels and the Yiddish poet Itzik Fefer, two leaders of the committee, traveled abroad where they aroused intense enthusiasm—speaking, for example, to a crowded Polo Grounds in New York about the Soviet war effort, Nazi crimes, and the solidarity of the Jewish people.

Ehrenburg set up a literary commission under the auspices of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to prepare the three books. But once Soviet armies began to advance, he sensed a change in mood. His articles began to be censored more heavily; he was told "there was no need to mention the exploits of Jews in the Red Army," even when addressing an American audience. (During the war Jews received the third highest number of Hero of the Soviet Union medals among Soviet troops, after Russians and Ukrainians, who are by far the most numerous ethnic groups in the country. Yet to this day Jewish heroism is often ignored or derided, obscured by the popular myth that "Ivan fought at the front while Abram was in Tashkent.")

Ehrenburg's book, *One Hundred Letters*, a collection of communications he had received from soldiers, was due to appear in 1945. But it came out only in French (in Moscow) while the Russian edition was withdrawn. Ehrenburg sought an explanation, but all he was told was "this isn't 1941." Presumably, the book's account of Jewish suffering (which was only part of its content) was too much for the censor.

The Black Book had a similar fate. The literary commission was dissolved by 1945 and the material Ehrenburg had collected was returned to the Committee. According to the editors of this volume, the Committee reduced the size of the book and altered some of the text. Ehrenburg still tried to get it published. "The type was set up," he writes in his memoirs, "the book reached proof stage, and we were told it would be published in 1948." But Stalin had other plans: Mikhoels was murdered, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was dissolved along with its Yiddish publishing house, and *The Black Book* never appeared.*

EHRENBURG did what he could to preserve the original documents. He filled three enormous albums with the material, including "a Greek-language prose work on the tragedy of Greek Jewry, a long poem written in French on cigarette paper in a death camp, an approximately 200-page drama written in Hebrew, the diaries of several Jewish children who had found refuge in Catholic churches, and poems and notes in Yiddish." He gave it all to the Jewish museum in Vilnius on the condition that the albums be returned if the museum were to be closed. When that indeed occurred, two workmen discreetly brought the material to Moscow where he kept it. As late as 1965, Ehrenburg still had the albums in his apartment. That summer, Novosti (the Soviet overseas publishing agency) called him to seek permission to publish *The Black Book* abroad. "In which languages?" he asked. "French, German, Spanish, English," they replied. "And Russian?" he inquired. When they said no, Ehrenburg turned them down. Perhaps it is coincidental, but sometime that year Abram Sutskever (a native of Vilnius who knew Ehrenburg during the war and prepared parts of the book) brought the text of *The Black Book* to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

The manuscript was in poor condition; parts were lost, pages could barely be read. It took years to restore a good deal of the text and prepare the manuscript for publication. An additional factor impeding progress toward publication was opposition based on the book's Soviet character—positive references to Stalin, the emphasis on the help given by non-Jews to Jewish victims of Nazism, and little mention of collaboration. These qualities are present in *The Black Book*, but they do not obscure its significance. For this is an eloquent, disquieting, and courageous document.

The Black Book we have today is a collection of accounts from scores of cities and villages on Soviet territory which were occupied by German forces. Once the Nazis retreated, Soviet writers and journalists came with the Red Army to interview survivors and document the massacres.

The war brought out the best in

* Curiously, a book on Jewish partisan resistance was issued by Der Emes publishing house in October 1948 in a limited Russian-language edition. Entitled *Partisan Brotherhood*, it was compiled by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. The Israeli journalist Binyamin West prepared a Hebrew translation in 1968. Just this year Jack Nusan Porter, whose father was a partisan hero in the Ukraine, edited an English version, *Jewish Partisans, A Documentary of Jewish Resistance in the Soviet Union During World War II* (University Press of America).

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many of these writers, giving them a chance to speak honestly about the suffering around them. It would be years before Soviet writers would dare approach their own country's history with similar passion, directness, and sincerity. They could not write about Magadan or Vorkuta in the Gulag, but Vasily Grossman could visit Treblinka and be the first to interview survivors, describe how the camp worked, and document the diabolical charade that accompanied the prisoners' march from the trains to the gas chambers:

> Here, according to witnesses, the heartrending scenes usually began. The instinct of maternal, conjugal, filial love told the victims that they were seeing one another for the last time. Handshakes, kisses, blessings, tears, briefly murmured words invested with all the love, all the anguish, all the tenderness and despair that filled them were now exchanged. The SS psychiatrists of death knew that these emotions had to be stamped out at once. The psychiatrists of death were familiar with the primitive laws that operate in all the slaughterhouses of the world, laws which in Treblinka were applied by the cattle to the human beings.

Grossman was the first person anywhere to write about Treblinka. His essay appeared in the Soviet Union in 1944 and was then translated and published in several foreign languages the following year. It has long been neglected; its inclusion gives *The Black Book* genuine literary distinction.

OTHER writers too produced vivid accounts, based on material they were handed by Ehrenburg or collected on their own from survivors. Abram Sutskever and Ovady Savich spoke with survivors in Lithuania. Margarita Aliger worked on testimonies from the Brest area in Byelorussia. Ehrenburg himself prepared about a third of the material in this edition: letters from children in Byelorussia, from soldiers who lost their families, and testimonies he must have taken from survivors in a host of towns and villages. Ehrenburg relates one story, about a man who hid under the kitchen stove, with almost biblical concision:

> Natalya Emelyanovna hid her husband in a hole under the stove. He spent more than two years there. He had to sit bent over, since there was not room to lie down or stand up. When he sometimes came up at night, he was not able to straighten out. It was concealed from the children that their father was hiding in the cellar. Once the four-year-old daughter looked in a crack and saw large black eyes. She was frightened and shouted: "Mama, who is there?" Natalya Emelyanovna calmly answered: "It's a very large rat; I noticed it a long time ago."
>
> Natalya Emelyanovna fell ill with typhus. She was taken away to the hospital, and a neighbor took in her children. At night Isaak Rosenberg crawled out and ate the glue from the wallpaper for two weeks. In the hospital Natalya Emelyanovna worried that she might give away her husband in a delirium.
>
> In September 1943, units of the Red Army came almost right up to the small town. Monastyrshchina is a crossroads, and the Germans resisted strongly at that point. The battles went on, and armed Germans were next to the Rosenberg house. Like the other residents of Monastyrshchina, Natalya Emelyanovna took the children and fled into the forest. She returned when Red Army soldiers entered the town. She found still-smoking ashes and the stove; the house had burned down. Isaak Rosenberg had died from asphyxiation. He had sat out twenty-six months in the cellar and died two days before Monastyrshchina was liberated by Soviet units.

As Margarita Aliger comments, "The entire time, in all these hiding places and cellars, from every pit and through every crack came scenes, each more terrible than the others. A bloody panorama of life was unfolding—a monstrous and daily spectacle of death."

These writers were equal to their task. Although the events they describe will seem sadly familiar to even the most casual reader of Holocaust literature, the stories are told with an emotional immediacy produced by the freshness of the events themselves and the unmistakable identification of these writers with their subject.

Publication of *The Black Book* has been long overdue; from now on, no history of the Holocaust will be complete without reference to it. And no evaluation of Ilya Ehrenburg's career will be fair unless it takes into account his attempt to compile and preserve a record of the greatest catastrophe to befall Soviet Jewry.

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Garp: Violence for the Educated

Richard Grenier

One of the most conspicuous features of our present culture is that we are subject to the most severe inhibitions regarding the use of force. For the intellectual class, with its various dependents and hangers-on, the use of violence for the preservation of the social order is for all practical purposes never legitimate, and if it should be attempted—these people usually succeed in convincing themselves—it will not work. On the day the British naval task force set forth for the South Atlantic in the recent Falkland Islands war, the first paragraph of the lead editorial in the New York *Times* announced that it was a "lesson in the occasional futility of modern armament." The editorial asked, "Once this menacing armada arrives, what precisely is it to do?" As if to back up the case that military force would not work, the same newspaper's London correspondent raised the possibility that the Argentines (whom he seemed to mistake for Iranians) might take Falkland Islanders hostage and kill them, if required, in order to forestall a British invasion. When things began to go badly for Argentina, and the Argentines called for a cease-fire—as nations have a tendency to do when they are losing in a military conflict—the anchor man of ABC's *Night Line* showed sharp displeasure at Sir Nicholas Henderson, Britain's ambassador to Washington, for his unwillingness to accept such an evenhanded, peace-loving solution, informing him emphatically that "all wars have to end in a negotiation."

But of course all wars do *not* end in a negotiation. In fact very few wars end in a negotiation in midstream, with the issues yet unresolved. There is such a thing as victory. One would have thought that the most cursory glance at history from *Carthago delenda est* to Appomattox, to Dacca, Cyprus, Kampala, and Ho Chi Minh City would have led the thinkers of ABC and the New York *Times* to realize that wars—repugnant though this might be to their moral sensibility—customarily end with one side or the other winning.

Most of the nation's commentators slide comfortably in and out of this pacific mode, and they slide out of it particularly easily when the force is being exercised by one of the peoples designated as the oppressed of the earth. But with their qualms, and unhistorical warnings, and sometimes quite desperate clutchings at straws to condemn military action by a Western nation, they are—as far as their own country is concerned—functional pacifists.

When it comes to force used against criminals, lawless elements within our own society, the case is equally clear. On a recent television panel, a law professor told two enraged law-enforcement officials in the smuggest terms that "we cannot expect more humane behavior from criminals until we behave more humanely toward them." This is not the sentiment of the American people, of which the police attitude is far more typical, but it is absolutely endemic in the educated classes. It is all about us in the culture. Examples are everywhere. We live in a society whose intellectual leaders feel a guilt at using force to defend their interests that is an anomaly in history.

Now there is a psychological law according to which, when a large part of human behavior is repressed, it will bubble up elsewhere, usually in some other form. I owe to Geoffrey Gorer the notion that it is the decline in the religious belief in eternal life that is responsible for the tremendous upsurge in the popular culture—and this for many decades now—of crimes of sudden death. In the 19th century, novelists did death scenes from "natural" causes (i.e., from disease or old age) in lavish detail. They were true virtuoso pieces. These scenes were intended for audiences that believed in the immortality of the soul. When this belief withered, the contemplation of the moribund flesh of a mortal man became unbearable, and deathbed scenes disappeared from popular novels, to be replaced with death by bang-bang, which, since it was not most people's expected lot, was more remote and consequently more acceptable, even exhilarating. Death by bang-bang in the popular arts reached such a crescendo as to convince many American intellectuals that we live in an extraordinarily "violent" society, whereas all statistics indicate that the level of violence in America, despite steeply rising crime rates, is in actual fact still quite low compared with some other parts of the world. The people of India, for example, which with its gurus and its swamis enjoys such a pacific international image, live amid everyday violence of such promiscuity that they find the subject quite unremarkable, and incidents of daily mayhem are simply not reported in the press.

But if death by bang-bang has remained a prevalent strain in American popular culture, to judge by mass paperback thrillers and television police series, what has there been in the way of vicarious violence for America's educated classes—which, in my view, would seem peculiarly in need of it? The great Westerns are gone. The great gangster movies are gone. These days a new twist would be required: perhaps a new high serious-comic style

Richard Grenier *is* Commentary's *regular movie critic. His new novel,* The Marrakesh One-Two, *will be published by Houghton-Mifflin this coming winter.*

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that by its infectious wit would make amputation, lacerations, mutilations, and even emasculations simply hilarious. I am suggesting that *The World According to Garp* is the thinking man's Tom and Jerry.

JOHN IRVING's bestseller has now been made into a major movie, starring Robin Williams, directed and co-produced by George Roy Hill, and scripted by the ever fashionable Steve Tesich. But first I must return briefly to the novel to give a feeling of Irving's literary style.* The first chapter, 31 pages long, is the story of how T. S. Garp came to be. Its pages are taken up with what playwrights call "exposition." Garp's mother, Jenny Fields, is from a wealthy Boston manufacturing family. Her two brothers go to Harvard, but Jenny, because of an odd Puritan strain in her character, quits Wellesley to become a nurse at "Boston Mercy Hospital." Jenny, in addition, is something of a sexual prude. There are many signs to tell us we are in for some unrealistic fun, such as Jenny going about day and night in her white nurse's uniform, but the merriment really begins on the bottom of page six, when Irving tells his first joke. Hospitals are often known by shortened versions of their names and Boston's Peter Bent Brigham hospital is apparently known as "Peter Bent." So when a man, staggering and his face purple with pain, hails a taxi, crying, "Hospital! Hospital!" the cab driver replies, "The Peter Bent?" "It's worse than *bent*," the man moans. "I think Molly bit it *off*!"

Now this is not a very funny joke. A bent peter is not a plausible reason for an emergency visit to a hospital, nor would the man misunderstand the cabdriver in this sense. Nor, in the normal course of events, do women performing fellatio frequently bite off the male member. On the other hand, the joke serves as an introduction to Irving's obsessional interest in mutilation, particularly of sexual parts—one of his hallmarks—and to a good deal of detail on the afflictions to male genitals which Jenny Fields encounters in the course of her nursing. In the early days of World War II, when our story starts, male genitalia of gonorrhea patients were treated in Jenny's hospital with a sulfa drug, while those afflicted with syphilis were treated with a variant of arsenic. As a general tonic, it appears, 100 cubic centimeters of water were forced up the soldier's penis and urethra by a device known as the "Valentine irrigator."

With this to set the tone, we now have Jenny Fields, all dressed in virtuous white, as the object of sexual advances by a soldier in a Boston movie house. He touches her knee. "Get your stinking hand off me," she says. (Gamy language from respectable and even prudish people is another Irving mannerism.) The soldier continues with his advances, so Jenny unsheathes a medical scapel and lays his arm open to the bone from shoulder to wrist. In subsequent sparring she attempts to slice off his nose, but only succeeds in removing part of his upper lip. A merry irony in all this is that Jenny's mother is convinced her daughter is promiscuous and keeps sending her douche bags, first nine, then many more. We lose count, but are treated to a jolly douche-bag scene. Then we segue into providing a father for Garp with an entertaining section on all the hideous war wounded who are being brought into Boston Mercy Hospital: the burned, the faceless, the paralyzed, the imbecilic. Garp's father, we learn, was a ball-turret gunner in a B-17. His predecessor had been crushed to a pulp when his plane crash landed with its ball turret unretracted, causing the squadron adjutant, when he saw the remains, to vomit in his jeep. Garp's father was not noticeably luckier, catching a piece of flak that turned him into a drooling idiot. Here again someone vomits, this time a medic. But the wondrous thing about Technical Sergeant Garp is that, despite his imbecilic state, and his constantly deteriorating physical condition, he is blessed with "especially large erections" and spends most of his time masturbating publicly, on one occasion to a "reassuring seal-like chorus" of men cheering him on.

The match of the frigid, sex-hating Jenny Fields and the drooling sergeant with the large erections was truly made in heaven. Because Jenny, you see, while determined to keep to her rigorously independent, austere, sex-free, man-free life, wants a baby. She is not aware of her opportunity at first, contenting herself with offering the idiot sergeant her breasts to suck as a pacifier and helping him masturbate with her "cool, powdered hand" (odd things for a priggish woman to do, but I suppose that's life). The scene in which Jenny decides to copulate with the sergeant, who is sinking fast, is artfully set. In the bed on one side of the ward is a flame-thrower victim, slippery with salve. He has no eyelids and appears always to be watching, but is blind. On the other side is a soldier who has lost his rectum and lower intestine and is constantly urinating and defecating. "Goddamn shit!" he cries as Jenny mechanically straddles the idiot's large erection. "*Good*," says the idiot as he "shoots up inside her as generously as a hose in summer." The soldier who has lost rectum and lower intestine thereupon snarls, "Piss!" Soon the imbecilic sergeant dies and his son, T. S. (for Technical Sergeant) Garp is born, with, as his mother puts it, "his own goddamn name." Thus does T. S. Garp come into this world.

THIS is a fair account of this distinguished novel's first chapter, although a mere summary cannot hope to convey the lightness, the gaiety, and the delight with which these events are related in the book. It is also a fair indication of the general flavor of the book, which provides us with an endless stream of mutilations, rapes, maimings, agonizing deaths, hideous accidents and operations, physical deformities lovingly dwelt on, and bodily excretions of all sorts copiously detailed. In one example among hundreds, Garp's mistress, a motherly fifty, with him now nineteen, has had removed by surgery her vagina, breasts, much of her digestive tract, and her rectum. Garp soon joins in the spirit of the thing himself and wishes he could arrange a maiming

* See Joseph Epstein's perceptive essay, "Why John Irving Is So Popular," COMMENTARY, June 1982.

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as "a kind of moral lesson" to malefactors. He becomes a writer, like John Irving, and writes a novel called *The World According to Bensonhaver*, the climax of which is a rape for which the victim avenges herself by calmly cutting her aggressor's throat ("she heard a sound like someone sucking the bottom of a drink with a clogged straw"), and disemboweling him, covering the rapee with "gallons" of "blood and bowel," the blood "fountaining" over her, the bowels "emptying." But, alas, blood coagulates. "Everything that was slick was turning sticky." Another lesson in life, perhaps.

The reviewers said that *The World According to Garp* was "joyous," "designed primarily to entertain," and "rich and humorous" (New York *Times Book Review*); that we should study it "with laughter, with excitement"; and that "the imagination soars." The bowels empty, but the imagination soars.

THE debate as to who is the *auteur* of a movie is still simmering quietly along. George Roy Hill, *Garp*'s director and co-producer, has known both the commercial heights and the commercial depths of Hollywood, from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Sting* to the recent syrupy fiasco, *A Little Romance*. He is responsible in an overall way for the picture we see on the screen, for the "visuals," the editing, the casting, to a degree for the shaping of the performances, for the picture's "look," its stress and timing. For *Garp* he was required to compress immensely, find "equivalents." But his style is sufficiently respectful of the original work (not necessarily a bad thing) that I would no more consider him the "author" of *Garp* than of the movie version of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, which he also directed. *Garp*'s screenwriter, Steve Tesich, has also had his ups and his downs, his biggest up being *Breaking Away* and his biggest down *Four Friends*, an ode to the 60's, in which the hero, having experienced the fears and miseries of American capitalism, finds true love and happiness as a steelworker. (An abrupt and embarrassing flop in the U.S., where it disappeared in days, *Four Friends* has been a triumph in Europe, where Hollywood's anti-capitalist or anti-American films have recently found their biggest market.) But I have seen all of Tesich's movies, and seen or read all of his plays, and do not find his hand much in evidence in *Garp*. So, in *The World According to Garp*, we have a movie the principal responsibility for which I, at least, am perfectly prepared to lay at the door of the author of the original novel, John Irving (who, coincidentally, is a close personal friend of Kurt Vonnegut).

Live flesh-and-blood actors performing away on judiciously exposed and edited film stock exist in a completely different medium from that of characters on the printed page, and a way had to be found of transposing to the screen Irving's "life-loving" humor, which abides in the book in his abundance of light-hearted narrative detail: the defecations, urinations, vomit, mutilations, bodies smashed to jelly, and all that. Glenn Close, who plays Nurse Jenny Fields, Garp's mother, had to come up with something. The story of her own fertilization, which she recounts in dialogue early in the movie, she delivers in a pedantic, punctilious, schoolmarmish manner: the sergeant's "permanent" erections, his cretinousness and physical deterioration, her sober opportunity. I suppose it is possible to make a pedantic manner seem funny, but I have never seen it yet in a movie, and it is not funny here. Robin Williams (Garp), a stand-up comic best known for playing Mork in television's *Mork and Mindy*, shows the classic failing of comedians called to do serious drama when he attacks the serious, "human" aspects of his character: he is sentimental. For the critics who found the film "warm," Robin Williams should take all the credit. There was a problem of transposition here, too. The book's admirers have felt that Garp is a positive, loving character, engaged in a search for sanity in an insane world. Williams's solution to this problem of portrayal is to be human, to feel. The result is mush.

IN THE film as in the book, Jenny Fields becomes a nurse, and raises her son, at the "Steering Prep School for Boys" (Irving attended Phillips Exeter). There young Garp discovers an enthusiasm for wrestling, writing, and Helen (Mary Beth Hurt), the wrestling coach's literary daughter. On graduation, mother and son set off for New York to embark on literary careers, he as a small-audience "quality" writer, she, to everyone's surprise, as the author of a gigantically successful autobiographical book called *A Sexual Suspect*, which makes her a public figure with a mass following—but only among women. Now we know that Jenny Fields is against "lust," and we can infer from her life that she believes in female independence, wants to work, and is not exactly in need of male company. But she is presented as a wholesome, "healthy" woman, she is admired by her son, and what she has put into this book of hers to make her the adored idol of vast multitudes of frenzied feminists is slightly mysterious. When Garp visits his mother on the inherited family estate on the New Hampshire coast, he finds the house has been taken over by a particularly fanatic cult called the Ellen Jamesians, after Ellen James, a young girl who was raped and had her tongue cut out so she could not reveal the identity of her attackers. These women, a somewhat angry lot, have all cut out their own tongues in protest.

Now the notion of thousands of women cutting out their own tongues is just a teeny bit repulsive, or, in any event, does not make me laugh. It is also not particularly logical, even symbolically. There can be no doubt that the Ellen James cult, like much else in both the film and the book, was suggested by the current, powerful feminist movement. But this movement, to my knowledge, has never been notable for self-immolation. Its punitive drives are directed entirely outward. So if the Ellen James cult is intended as some kind of light-hearted spoof of feminist excesses, it simply does not work. (In this book we are treated to a full description of the horrible stump that remains in these women's mouths, with the black stitches "like ants" where the tongue used to be. If this is satire, it is too so-

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phisticated for me.) Another of the female eccentrics that Garp finds firmly established in his mother's household is a certain Roberta Muldoon, who before the amputation of her (his) penis and various other plumbing alterations was Robert Muldoon, a tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles. Roberta is played by an excellent actor named John Lithgow, who stands six-feet-four, does an absolutely first-class drag act, and is about the only thing I enjoyed in the movie. Transsexuals, however, are not feminist militants, and would not be drawn to the leadership of a Nurse Fields. They have little envy and resentment directed against the male gender, a condition which they have after all voluntarily abandoned.

BUT along with the goings on of Jenny Fields and her transsexuals and Ellen Jamesians, we are shown, in parallel, the story of her son, the writer. Garp marries Helen, the daughter of the wrestling coach, and they settle down in suburbia and have two children. She supports the family by teaching English at a nearby college. He stays home, cooks, takes care of the kids, and writes. He commits adultery. She commits adultery. But she commits adultery more ornately, performing fellatio on one of her students in a parked car just as Garp comes smashing into the car from the rear, causing her to bite off the student's penis. One of their children is killed in the crash, and the other one loses an eye, so it is really very amusing. But soon Garp and Helen are emotional about each other again, loving, warm, forgiving, forgiven, laughing joyfully and affirmatively at life, trying to save their sanity in this insane world. When Robin Williams is emotional his face gets all red and swollen, very unpleasant to look at, the kind of thing at least you don't have to see when you read a novel.

In the last phase of the film the two stories intertwine. Garp becomes so indignant at the antics of these Ellen Jamesians that although warned they are dangerous, he writes a book attacking them. Surprise event: his mother, attending a mass political rally, is assassinated by a male anti-feminist. Her feminist supporters take charge of her funeral in such a strong-armed manner that Garp is forced to wear women's clothes and to attend the funeral incognito, and is almost lynched when discovered. But a woman gets him in the end anyway, gunning him down as he coaches a wrestling class. As the film ends, Garp is being helicoptered away to a hospital, chattering cheerfully in his life-affirming way about "flying . . . flying. . . ." When the credits roll, a large part of the audience probably wanders out, uncertain whether Garp has been murdered or not, perhaps not even thinking about it. In the book, in any case, there is no ambiguity: Garp is good and dead. Is he the victim of woman's inhumanity to man? Is this an anti-feminist movie? We shall see.

JOHN IRVING's prime spiritual ancestor, for all his evident reading of recent academic novelists, is beyond any question the sick joke. But the heyday of the sick joke was a quarter of a century ago, the 50's, the Eisenhower years, and it was of course not a joke at all. It was not really intended to be funny (no more than a "practical" joke). A successful sick joke was greeted not with mirth but with a kind of country-boy hooting, as if to say, "Boy, you are one mean son of a bitch." (A true, period sick joke was: " 'Mommy, why can't I go outside and play?' Answer: 'Shut up, cripple, and deal.' ") It was an essentially masculine game, competitive, boastful. It was not saber-rattling but a kind of callousness-rattling. It was unintelligent, vulgar, and humorless, but it was the answer to Henry V's solemn prayer, in Shakespeare, on the eve of Agincourt: "God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts." The purpose of the sick joke was to demonstrate that the speaker was tough, hard-bitten, lean, and mean, that nothing could shock him—qualities of which people were proud in those days, believe it or not, as they are the qualities usually needed in order to prevail, and sometimes even to survive. It was a period of totally unprecedented American ascendancy, expansion, and assertiveness in all areas. Massive amounts of foreign aid were going abroad and many other worthy and generous enterprises were undertaken. But it was also the period of the cold war. Memories of Pearl Harbor, Midway, Anzio, and Normandy were still vivid. The picture of the world was that it was a dangerous place. And we were in a fight. Hearts were like rock.

The replacement of Eisenhower by Kennedy did not produce any noticeable softening (Vienna, Berlin, the Cuban missile crisis), but as the 60's and the 70's wore on, the most extraordinary sea change overtook America's educated classes. Whereas in the 50's young university graduates had prided themselves on being "tough-minded," "hard-headed," and other such terms, their successors prided themselves above all on being compassionate, tolerant, humane, "feeling," "caring." Honorable as these traits may be, the shift was so radical and far-reaching as to bring about, in some cases, a sharp divorce from reality, and even a virtual paralysis of the will where strong action might be required for our society's benefit. And now along comes John Irving, peddling the exact same kind of sick joke that members of an earlier generation never really laughed at, but hooted at, to show they had strong stomachs and steely nerves. But graduates of the new generation, who live in an imaginary world—which if it were not for some pointless obstructions would be totally kind, gentle, and giving—are so removed from understanding the harshness in life that they are giggling spontaneously, helplessly, and irrepressibly at *The World According to Garp*. But in order to keep cruelty funny it is necessary also to keep it unreal, which a novel can do more easily than a movie. Which is why I expect that the film of *Garp*, severely toned down though it might be, will be somewhat less successful than the book. It is not everyone who will laugh at a child who has lost an eye, even when he lost it in the same accident during which his mother bit off a student's penis.

BUT there is more to *Garp* than cruelty, scatology, mutilations, and narcissistic mannerisms. It is swimming from one end to the other in sexual inversion. Garp is a

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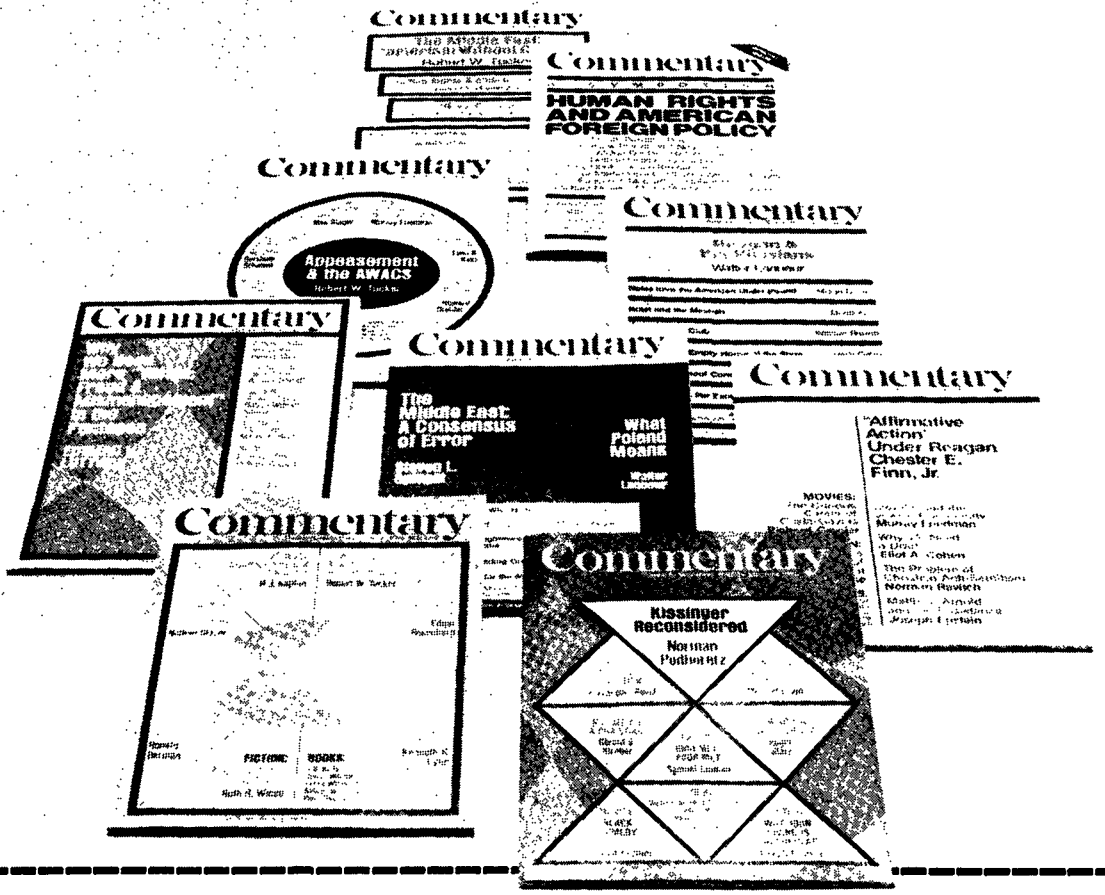

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contented house-husband. While his wife works, he cooks and keeps house. He is more devoted to the children than she. His one ostentatious claim to masculinity is his wrestling—of which more later. Nurse Fields, Garp's mother, has obvious masculine attributes. I would have described Glenn Close's performance as "mannish," and Mary Beth Hurt's playing of Garp's wife as "sexless," but I find checking back in the novel that Irving himself has described Jenny Fields as having "a mannish way of walking," as well as possessing "rump and hips so slender and hard that, from behind, she resembled a young boy." Garp's wife, Helen, moreover, is described as having "small, tight" thighs, "hard hips and small breasts," and "very thin lips," and as being "as slender and almost as tall as a young tree . . . taller than Garp by two inches or more."

In *Garp*, women built according to the more conventional female model, with large breasts and that sort of thing, are almost invariably ugly or disfigured. A piece is missing from their lip, their forehead carries a pitted scar, or at the very least they have a speech defect. Garp's neighbor in suburbia, a Mrs. Ralph, is described thus: "Her large, downpointing breasts shine—they slouch across her freckled chest as she leans back on her elbows and burps.... Her pubic hair is wet and glistens at Garp; her belly, furrowed with stretch marks, looks as white and parboiled as if Mrs. Ralph has been under water for a long time." When Garp makes a hospital visit to his mistress who has had her vagina removed, he pops a cherry into his mouth. This is what makes it all humorous. I don't think I will be accused of going beyond the evidence if I consider Roberta Muldoon, the former Philadelphia Eagles tight end, another example of sexual inversion. (Note the "tight end," repeated time and again in the book.) Garp is compelled to dress in women's clothes in order to attend his mother's funeral. The Ellen Jamesians' hatred of men is so pathological as to suggest that they, perhaps, might want to be men. (In another of Irving's novels, when a man has an operation on his penis, it is sewn up with the same ant-like black stitches as these women's tongue stumps.)

But if heterosexual sex is described in *Garp* with no enthusiasm, occasionally even placed in a quite disgusting setting, the most beautiful bodily encounters take place during the wrestling matches. Here taut, young, male bodies struggle, lithe limb against lithe limb. The terminology is sexual: "coupling," "bucking twosome," "rape." In the movie's penultimate scene, with Garp, as wrestling coach, presiding over the gymnasium, this male holy of holies, filled with ardent, young "coupling" men, it is a berserk female woman who suddenly erupts amid all the masculine splendor and shoots him down. Now you can draw your own conclusions.

It will seem contradictory to some, but not to others, that John Irving is hell on penises. An altogether disproportionate number of his maimings are directed at genitals, but far more at male parts than at female. If *Garp* opens with details of the "Valentine irrigator," *The Water-Method Man*, another Irving novel, opens with the hero having a glass rod forced up his penis. The whole book is about a man with an ailment of his urethra, for which the "water method" is the proposed cure, but it fails and leads to a penis operation. In *Garp* two penises are amputated, only one under anesthetic, and penis amputation is in the air on several other occasions. In Irving's work, penises come in for terrific punishment.

As for Irving's stand on feminism, I gather that it is generally perceived to be equivocal. After all, despite the Ellen James cult, Garp is Irving's hero, and he is a happy house-husband, doing the cooking and cleaning while his wife works. Fair is fair. A woman film critic for the New York *Times*, while writing that Irving appeared to be simultaneously ridiculing and embracing feminism, congratulated the movie for its "graceful" way of bringing to life both the "fiercely feminist" Nurse Fields and the Ellen Jamesians, "who are more or less her disciples." This critic, who considered the novel of *Garp* endearing and "whimsical," found the film "gentle" and even more charming than the book. I find *Garp* neither endearing, whimsical, charming, nor gentle, and would approach the question of Irving's feminism or anti-feminism somewhat differently. I would alter the phrasing. Irving either changes women into boys or does quite frightful things to them. I do not think he likes them very much. He does frightful things to men, too, of course. But there you have it. That's what all this loving of life comes to.

It was a posh lot that made this movie. Film-makers are going to fancier and fancier schools, as are some novelists. George Roy Hill graduated from Yale. John Lithgow graduated from Harvard. Steve Tesich, although born in Yugoslavia, was a graduate student at Columbia. Irving, of course, graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy, no doubt some years after Gore Vidal, before studying as far afield as Vienna. I know nothing of Irving's private life other than what is in the publicity handouts or has appeared in the press. He has said he has only three things in common with Garp, wrestling, writing, and being a family man, but I assume that this is now down to wrestling and writing since I read in the public prints that he has just abandoned his wife and children in Putney, Vermont, and moved to New York. Irving appears to make much of being a "New Englander," apparently meaning he feels he embodies some of the region's values. I am from Massachusetts myself, born there of parents born there. In my wife's case, this goes back more than 300 years. But I do not recognize New England in the work of John Irving. I defer, however. I defer. Perhaps it has all come to this.

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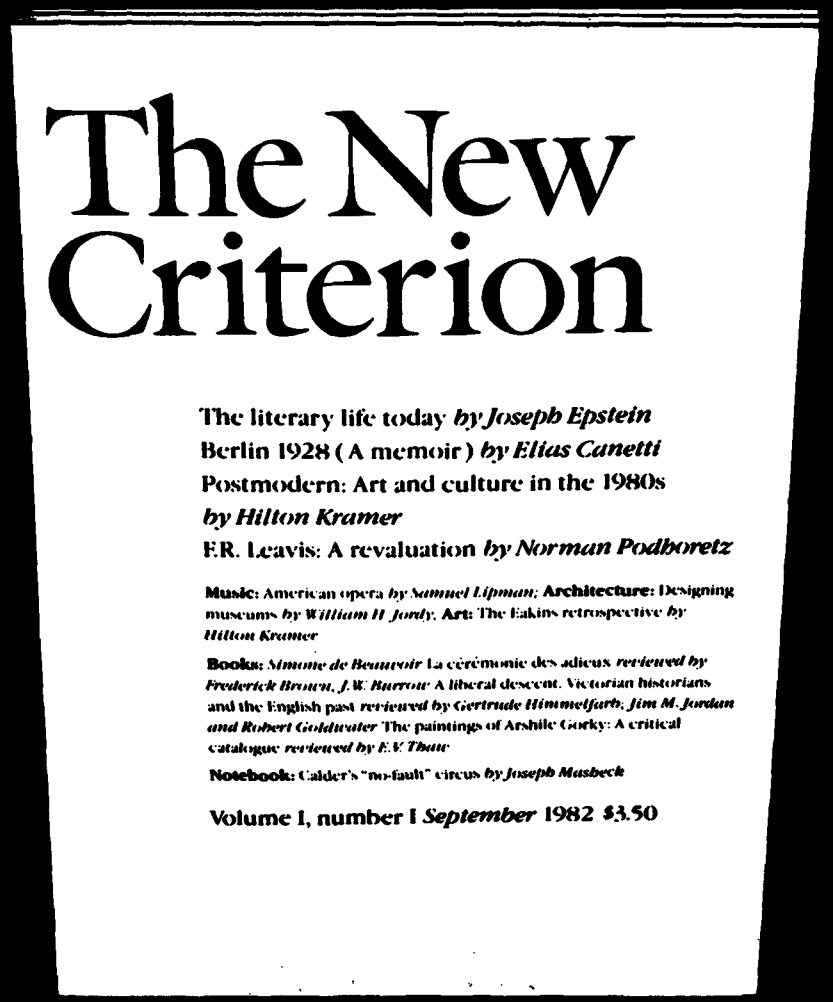
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Books in Review

The Wheel of History

THE STORY OF THE STORIES: THE CHOSEN PEOPLE AND ITS GOD. By DAN JACOBSON. *Harper & Row. 211 pp. $11.95.*

Reviewed by HILLEL HALKIN

SOME years ago the South African-English-Jewish author Dan Jacobson wrote a novel called *The Rape of Tamar*. It was not, in my opinion, a successful book. This was in part because it did not take seriously enough the biblical narrative that it drew its plot from, so that, instead of portraying its characters as the human beings magnified by passion that one feels them to be in the Bible, it debunkingly reduced them to a fatuous clique of scoundrels and ninnies—a sure prescription for failure in a historical novel, which, if it cannot manage to maintain, let alone enhance, the intensity of history for the reader, might as well leave history alone. Indeed, Jacobson himself, it would seem, realized his mistake, for he has since twice made amends: once to his own tale by taking the thematic substance of *The Rape of Tamar*, giving it a contemporary setting, and rewriting it as a first-rate work of fiction entitled *The Confessions of Josef Baisz*, and now, a second time, to the Bible, in a work of literary criticism that is nothing if not serious and intense.

Of course, literary criticism of the Bible is in vogue these days, so much so that, faced with the current outpouring of it, one might almost believe that the text of Scripture had been recently found in a cellar, as it was by Hilkiyahu the scribe in the time of King Josiah, and were being deciphered for the first time. Suddenly the word is out that the Bible too is literature; and forthwith, equipped with the precision tools of the trade, an army of academicians has marched off into its pages to hunt for synechdoches and metonymies, track down metaphors and images, discover hidden ironies and tensions, and unearth realities-behind-appearances and appearances-behind-realities that would do a T.S. Eliot poem or an E.M. Forster novel proud. Some of this output is undoubtedly of genuine interest; much of it is predictably dreary; but little of it, for all its concern with how biblical narrative "works," makes any serious attempt to inform us what the Bible is really *about*. Like a great deal of contemporary literary criticism, it might be compared with a lesson in horology in which one is told the precise construction and function of every cog, spring, wheel, and balance in the mechanism of a clock—everything, in fact, but how to tell the time that is on the clock face.

Dan Jacobson's new book is not this sort of nuts-and-bolts dissection of a text; indeed, it is very much a bold attempt to grapple with the Bible as a whole. Although Scripture, its title gives us notice, contains many stories, it is not with the details of any of them that Jacobson is concerned; rather, it is with "the story of the stories," that is, with the central "plot" of the entire Bible considered as one book, starting with Genesis and ending with the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. (To readers familiar with Jacobson's previous work, it is hardly necessary to point out that this coupling of Old and New Testaments for purposes of literary analysis is by no means due to any Christian bias on his part.)

Of course, all this presupposes that such a "plot" really exists, and that the Bible can or should be read as a single coherent document rather than as the thousand-year compilation of multiple and mutually inconsistent sources that historical scholarship has taught us it is. And in this ahistorical readiness to gloss it as a single synchronic text regardless of when and by whom various parts of it were written, Jacobson shares a basic assumption with the new school of biblical literary criticism on the whole. (As does the latter, curiously, with traditional Jewish and Christian hermeneutics, for which the unity of Scripture was an axiom.) The originality and imaginative scope with which he applies this assumption are what make *The Story of the Stories* the remarkable book that it is.

BRIEFLY, his thesis is as follows:

If we read the Bible at face value, what it most obviously seems to be about is the long and stormy relationship between the Children of Israel and their God, and the many vicissitudes that mark its course. This relationship was initiated, the Bible tells us, by God, but once formalized in the Covenant it is forever binding on both parties—who, indissolubly pledged to each other, proceed to act out the most contradictory attitudes and emotions. The Israelites are alternately grateful for God's attentions and resentful of His demands, obedient toward Him and rebellious, devoted and unfaithful, supremely confident in His love and terrified of His wrath; while He, in His dealings with them, is by turn unstintingly generous and morbidly suspicious, tenderly loving and full of hateful spite, solicitous of their welfare and capable of wreaking on them the most frightful retributions, brutally implacable and touchingly stricken with remorse for what He does. We have, in a word, a highly ambivalent relationship that is constantly oscillating between emotional extremes. Not an ideal marriage, perhaps even a deeply unhappy one, but a lively one for all that, and one that (at least, according to the Christian view, until New Testament times) neither party is willing to see end in a divorce.

So far, of course, nothing much has been said that any intelligent reader of the Bible cannot see for himself. But at this point Jacobson throws out a leading question. If, he asks, one does not think as a believing Jew or Christian, but rather assumes, as he himself does, that it was man who created Jehovah instead of the other way around, and that the God of the Bible and

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HILLEL HALKIN, *a writer and critic who lives in Israel, is the author of* Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist's Polemic. *His articles in* COMMENTARY *include "Whose Palestine? An Open Letter to Edward Said" (May 1980) and "Driving Toward Jerusalem" (January 1975).*

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His relations with His chosen people are in fact the collective mythical invention of that people itself, how is one to explain the contents of this myth? Or to put it differently: if, ultimately, both Israel's feelings toward its God and God's feelings toward Israel are an outward projection of Israel's inner life, what can be the source of the profound ambivalence that Israel feels toward itself and toward the world? What psychological dynamic is at work here?

To which *The Story of the Stories* replies:

Obviously, a people that wishes to believe that it alone has been chosen by a universal, omnipotent God to be the special beneficiary of His favors (for there would be nothing unusual in being preferred by a god who was merely one more tribal deity among many) is a people with an exalted sense of itself—so unrealistically exalted, in fact, that in some cranny or crevice of its being it must be aware of the enormous hubris that is involved in such a conception of its own role. (Indeed, the reviewer might interject at this point, do not both modern psychology and ordinary observation assure us that such an exaggerated sense of superiority is itself commonly a compensation for deep-seated feelings of unworthiness?) At the same time, therefore, that this people prides itself on its specialness and on its divinely granted good fortune that has, among other things, delivered it from bondage in Egypt and given it a fruitful land wrested forcefully from others, it lives in constant fear of the comeuppance that is awaiting it and that is even due it for its pride. In Jacobson's words:

> Thus, while exulting over Yahweh's choice, and rejoicing in the discomfiture of their enemies, who had been passed over and rejected, the composers of the biblical story could never lose sight of the terrifying possibility that it might be their turn next to join the ranks of the rejected. That was the danger to which they had exposed themselves imaginatively in evoking a God who had exercised choices of such a fateful kind; that was the price they had to pay for the favor He had bestowed on them. The constant

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presence of the possibility of such a rejection is one of the wonders of the entire tale. Sooner or later it is bound to happen, the story implicitly tells us, to those who seek preferment on special terms from the world all men are compelled to live in. . . . The explicit moral of the Bible is that the people of Israel fall into God's disfavor only when they disobey Him; the tacit moral is that *the very notion of having been chosen by such a God will produce the retribution appropriate to it.* It is, I suspect, because the former moral is urged upon us with such exhaustive vehemence that the latter has been virtually overlooked. [Emphasis in original]

The "terrifying possibility" of God's rejection, Jacobson writes, was further heightened for the Israelites by the "moral unease" felt by them over their dispossession of the native peoples who had preceded them in the land of Canaan —an unease well expressed by the biblical injunction that God's commandments must be obeyed, ". . . lest the land vomit you out when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you." Indeed, it is this haunting fear of tit for tat, of the wheel of divine fortune turning again, that explains the compulsive thoroughness of biblical legislation and the supreme emphasis placed in the Bible on unquestioning obedience to the Law. More than the Law being a writ of God's claims on Israel,

> The centrality given to the covenant Law in the Scriptures actually represents an attempt by the biblical writers to put a yoke upon Yahweh. . . . The Sinai covenant and everything that went with it should be seen as an all-but-explicit attempt by the biblical writers to preclude the possibility of this inveterate chooser among gods *again* exercising His free will, so far as the people of Israel and "the nations" are concerned. Once was enough. Twice could only mean disaster. Out of the arbitrariness and inscrutableness of the initial choice the biblical writers wanted to make something predictable and orderly and rational. Hence in lashing themselves down within the covenant, and to all its accompanying laws, they hoped to lash down Yahweh too. *Quid pro quo.*

By the time disaster actually strikes, therefore, intially in the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, and subsequently in that of the southern kingdom of Judah, it has been so thoroughly anticipated (perhaps even unconsciously sought) that, far from putting an end to its victims' unique conception of themselves, it only strengthens this conception and is quite naturally incorporated into the national myth. The very fact that God has gone to such lengths to chastise His people and inflict such suffering on them becomes proof in their eyes of His special relationship to them—and yet, Jacobson writes,

> . . . if the story of the rejection by Yahweh of His people is indeed an internalization by the biblical writers of certain ineluctable historical facts, it is as well an act of self-rejection on their part . . . in telling the story in these terms they committed themselves to blaming and fiercely rejecting those people, their fellow Israelites, their own kinsmen, whom they felt to be responsible for the disasters that had come upon the nation as a whole.

Thus, in the moment of being exiled from its land no less than in the moment of possessing it, in defeat and degradation as much as in triumph and celebration, great self-love and great self-hate are inextricably tangled together in Israel's psyche, playing off against and reinforcing each other at one and the same time. The greater the one, the greater the other; the greater the two of them, the greater the swing back and forth between them; the greater the swing, the greater the need to reconcile them by means of the collective myth, that is, by the biblical religion that eventually came to be known as Judaism.

But by the dialectic logic of this religion, the story is not yet over: "After rejection—renewal and restoration. In terms of the story the development was not merely logical or desirable; it was absolutely indispensable." Once the divine wheel of fortune has spun them down, delivering the blow they long have feared

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and purging their anxiety and guilt, the people of Israel can permit themselves to hope, even confidently believe, that it will now spin them up once more and that God will deliver them from their exile as He did once before in Egypt. And so, it would seem, the "great circular movement" of the biblical narrative, as Jacobson calls it, might be expected to continue *ad infinitum*, for the wheel set in motion by Israel's basic ambivalence must spin again and again, and the same tale that

> has seen the people move from a condition of homeless nomadism to possession of the land; from possession of the land to dispossession of it; from dispossession to exile; from exile to the hope or vision, at least, of reentry and true repossession

should logically lead to yet another round of exile and homelessness, thus recommencing the entire cycle. It was the need to break out of this vicious circle, Jacobson posits, that not only suggested, but ultimately demanded, the prophetic vision of the apocalypse. "Can such a story," he asks,

> ever really come to an end? . . . The prophets certainly willed that it should; hence their great, final effort of the imagination in presenting the renewal-to-come as a state of eternal rest, or arrest.

Indeed, it might be conjectured, only by means of such a last judgment, in which no more than a "saving remnant" of Israel is redeemed, so that the bad are punished and the good rewarded on their own merits instead of having to suffer and prosper together through unending national cycles, can the polarities of Israel's self-image be resolved. Self-love and self-hate are now separated out into the wheat and the chaff, the sheep and the goats, within Israel itself, and the chosen people's tortuous romance with its God has come to a happy end.

JACOBSON stops where the Bible does and does not pursue Jewish history and religious literature beyond its limits. Instead, he concludes with two chapters on the New Testament, which he sees as

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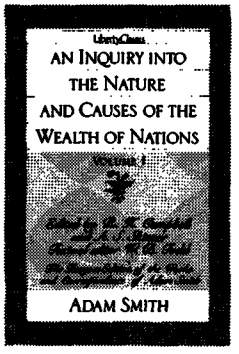

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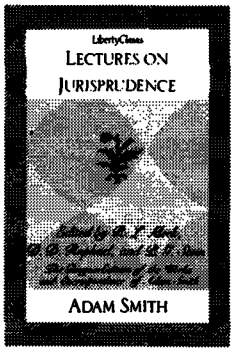

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both a logical sequence to Jewish Scripture and an ultimate repudiation of it. On the one hand, Christianity adopted the Old Testament's messianic myth—although, of course, with a difference:

> Oppressed, beleaguered, megalomaniac Israel had promised itself, through its prophets initially, and then through its apocalyptics, that one day its messiah would come in power and glory to overthrow all its enemies and vindicate its God for all time. Now Paul and others said: yes, he had come, but in such a humble guise that almost nobody had recognized him; in so lowly a form that the powerful and self-glorifying within Israel itself had no compunction in destroying him.

On the other hand, in adapting this myth to its own purposes, Christianity decisively rejected the people it originally referred to,

> which meant that within this surprising twist of the plot there lay concealed yet another. In order to bring about the great revolutions in history which had characterized His reign throughout, the God of Israel had repeatedly used evil persons, nations, and institutions as His instruments. . . . But on this occasion He had surpassed himself in ingenuity. He had used *Israel* in that very way. Israel had been turned into His instrument to torture the good He had sent into the world, in the form of His "Son," so that in the end a greater good might come. "The son of man," Jesus says of Judas Iscariot, "goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the son of man is betrayed." And woe to the people whose name Judas bore.

In this fashion Christianity too broke with the "great circular movement" of the Bible, not by prophesying an end to it, but by declaring that that end had already come. And in doing so, it achieved something else: by universalizing its constituency and rejecting the notion of a special, divinely chosen people, or rather, relegating it to a theologically superseded past, it freed its believers from the extreme emotional tension that had haunted the Jewish people since its beginnings. Now that it was no longer the possession of the Jews, the religion given by them to the world had lost its deep Jewish ambivalence.

NEEDLESS to say, the preceding account does not do full justice to a book that, while brief in length, is argued with great force and cogency. It is a virtue of such brevity that it leaves the reader to work out for himself ideas that have merely been suggested and makes him a partner in their development; hence the reflections that follow.

Is Dan Jacobson right? I doubt that the question can be answered. At stake here are not the facts themselves, but rather an interpretation of them, and interpretations are always arguable. As a reviewer I can only say that Jacobson's reading of the Bible makes a great deal of sense to me—and that I find it deeply disturbing.

What disturbs me about it, though, is not so much what it has to say about the roughly one-half of the Jewish historical past that it explicitly deals with. It is rather what it implies about the other half —that is, about the post-biblical period in which we are still living. Indeed, it is especially in connection with our own times that Jacobson's analysis stirs up some unwelcome thoughts.

The Hebrew prophets, Jacobson writes, sought to break out of the repetitive cycle of the biblical "plot" by envisioning a final, apocalyptic end to it, a messianic last act to the lengthy drama of Israel and God. The apocalypse, however, did not occur; and although the final books of the Bible, which were composed after the return from the Babylonian captivity and the building of the Second Temple, leave us with the people of Israel securely again in its land, the biblical cycle "from possession of the land to dispossession of it; from dispossession to exile; from exile to the hope . . . of reentry and true repossession" was to run its course again, from the golden age of the Hasmonean dynasty to the catastrophic failure of the two revolts against Rome; from the final loss of independence that followed to the near-total depopulation of Jewish Palestine; and from the long travail and ultimate horror of exilic life in the Diaspora to the renewed attempt to create a Jewish homeland in our time. In short—mysteriously, inexplicably, incredibly—the "great circular movement" of the Bible, having returned to its starting point, proceeded to go through another, complete, two-thousand-year-long phase.

ZIONISM, like biblical prophecy, sought a way out of this cycle—although unlike the prophets, of course, its proponents expected this to be brought about by means of human endeavor rather than of divine intervention. If the exile, they reasoned, was a historical misfortune that had fallen upon the Jews, an act of Jewish will could reverse it. In fact, this will already existed in the form of the traditional Jewish yearning for Zion; one only needed to give it the practical opportunity to express itself. And indeed, with the triumphant establishment of the state of Israel, the Zionist diagnosis seemed confirmed: the Jewish people, or at least a significant and growing part of it, was home again for good.

Or was it? For what is already clear today about the Jewish state is that, thirty-four years after its creation, it is a far more problematical affair than its founders ever thought it would be. Isolated among the nations, surrounded by enemies whose geopolitical strength is on the rise, weakened by internal dissension, a faltering economy, and a rising tide of emigration, faced with the fact that the Jews of the Diaspora have no desire to live in it and cannot be counted on to offset the steady growth of a hostile Arab minority in its midst, Israel is a country whose future appears far from assured. Can it be that, far from being an end to the repetitive cycle of events that began in Ur of the Chaldees nearly four thousand years ago, it will prove to be but another station touched by the turning wheel, which, as though endowed with some sort of diabolic perpetual motion, will continue to spin without cease? Zionism was no doubt right to see its victory as an integral moment in the pattern of Jewish history; suppose it should ironically

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be the case, however, that this same pattern must ultimately sweep it to its downfall?

A fanciful thought—certainly far more fanciful than *The Story of the Stories,* which sticks to a responsible analysis of biblical text; yet one which, if it was all but unthinkable ten or fifteen years ago, no longer seems quite so now, less than ever after reading Dan Jacobson's book. For what Jacobson has done is not just lucidly to describe what the "plot" of the Bible is about, but to give us a psycho-ethnic explanation of why it came to be written and lived; and if he is correct, or even partially correct, in what he says, one can hardly help asking whether the same psycho-ethnic factors, or some of them, are still at work among Jews today and are still producing the same reactions among Gentiles who encounter them. Of course, if one were talking about any other group of people, such a line of inquiry would be patently absurd. Who is there zany enough to suggest that one can understand something important about the character of contemporary Englishmen, let alone speculate on the future of Great Britain, by carefully studying *Beowulf*? Different times, different peoples—and the antiquity of *Beowulf* is less than half that of Leviticus or Kings.

But then this is the point: for not only do the English not consider *Beowulf* a sacred text, no other people beside the Jews has consistently interpreted its own history in the light of such a text, in which it has seen, in addition to the authoritative record of its past, the inviolable guide to its future. Precisely this living connection with the Bible has traditionally been the greatest source of Jewish strength—the awareness of which in our own times has motivated the secular political and educational establishment of Israel to give the Bible a position of great prominence in national life and to seize every opportunity to stress how Zionism is legitimized by scriptural chapter and verse. Nor is this an arbitrary procedure. One need only read the Bible (how many genuinely literate people, despite the current vogue of the new biblical criticism, still do?) to be struck by how persistently, in Genesis and in Exodus,

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in Jeremiah and in Isaiah, in the Book of Esther and in the Book of Lamentations, it reads like a running commentary on modern Jewish life. Its stories and descriptions repeat themselves in our own age; its characters speak lines that are plagiarized from men and women we know; it tells Jews more about what is happening to them than do the newspapers—and I, for one, find all this profoundly uplifting and profoundly scary.

Dan Jacobson's book does nothing to make it seem less so. The myths of the Bible, he says, were self-fulfilling because they both emerged from, and themselves helped to structure, the collective psychology of the people who believed in them and acted them out. In the minds of how many Jews today, and not necessarily just those who are aware of it, are these same myths, transmitted and sometimes transmuted from generation to generation, still active agents? Jacobson does not ask the question—but he forces us to. Would Jews still be Jews without them? The answer is the same. "History," said Stephen Dedalus, "is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake"—but is the Bible a Jewish nightmare or the necessary vision on which Jewish existence still depends? Or is it both? Or neither? If one goes on dreaming it, will its great plot-wheel continue to spin? And if one awakes from that dream, what reality will take its place?

Lust for Power

STALIN'S SECRET WAR. By NIKOLAI TOLSTOY. *Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 463 pp. $18.50.*

Reviewed by ADAM B. ULAM

THIS book is woven around three main themes. The first is the story of Stalin's crimes and guiles, with an emphasis on the period (1938-45) when the USSR stood on the brink of an abyss and then emerged as one of the world's two superpowers. The second is an account of the ignorance and naiveté of British and American officials in their dealings with the Soviet regime; it centers on the period just after World War II, which saw the forced repatriation by Western authorities of thousands of Soviet citizens and even old Russian émigrés who, voluntarily or not, had allowed themselves to be used by the Germans. Finally there is a disquisition on the factors that contributed to making the West so blind to the reality of Stalin's Russia; here Nikolai Tolstoy focuses on the array of Soviet agents, fellow-travelers, and plain dupes who occupied influential positions within the British and American establishments of those years.

None of these themes is new, but their interweaving makes an instructive, if depressing, tale—and one which has not lost its relevance when we look at the Soviet Union today or at what is currently being said and written about it in the West. Although Nikolai Tolstoy does not say so explicitly, the gullibility of the British and American governments in dealing with Stalin's Russia at the end of World War II, when that country was at its moment of greatest weakness and America was at the height of power, has weighed heavily over the destinies of the world ever since.

The inhumanity inherent in turning over thousands of ex-Red Army soldiers to the tender mercies of the Soviet security organs in 1945 was paralleled by Western acquiescence in Stalin's swallowing up of Eastern Europe. Actually there was some formal justification for repatriating nationals from Germany, namely, the agreement between the Big Three at Yalta. By contrast, letting Poland, Bulgaria, and the other territories become Soviet satrapies was predicated only upon a notion: that Moscow would never let go of an area once it had been dominated by the Red Army. This, however, is historically disproved by the cases of Finland, northern Iran in 1946, and Austria in 1955.

As these examples show, the United States did not have to go to war, or even threaten war, to prevent Eastern Europe from becoming enslaved. What was needed was a realistic view of the USSR, and tenacity in negotiating with the Kremlin. But in the crucial period between the Teheran and Potsdam conferences, the West failed to recognize the true nature of Stalin's Russia, and its real weaknesses. The consequent inability of the West to defend its values in Eastern Europe presaged future defeats and retreats in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.

How could the West have been so blind? And why, in the years under review here, did the Soviet people continue to tolerate and endure a regime which for the sheer weight of cruelty inflicted upon its own nation surpassed the record of the most sanguinary tyranny previously known to mankind?

The first question is not too difficult to answer. One large element had to do with the lingering malaise of Western society which persuaded so many rational and humane people that it was somehow old-fashioned and "ethnocentric" to apply our own standards of civilized behavior to a regime, or a movement, proclaiming the ideals of social justice and national emancipation. Absorbed in our own materialistic, bourgeois values, how could we judge those who, inspired by idealism, were resorting to practices that might have appeared barbarous but in fact offered proof of their earnestness of purpose?

Others who eulogized or professed affinity with Stalinism were driven by a more complex set of motivations. For some, the country that had produced Leo Tolstoy and Pushkin was still a primitive folk society, and it could not be either ruled or brought to undertake grandiose tasks of social engineering except by appropriately severe measures. Those who became Communists and/or agents of the Soviets were often inspired by contempt for their own people, if not for mankind in general. For them, Stalin's Russia was attractive precisely because it was ruthless, a regime that discounted human suffering as against the achievement of a political or economic goal.

There were genuine idealists, and genuinely deluded fellow-travelers, among the Western Communists in the 30's and 40's. But many, one

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suspects, were captivated by the sheer adventure and romance of political nonconformity, and even treason. And Communism in those days offered a fashionable kind of nonconformity. In England and France it did not hurt, in many cases it helped, a person's literary, artistic, or even academic career to be known as a sympathizer of the radical Left. For out-and-out Soviet agents, there was undoubtedly a special piquancy (and, as yet, little danger) in working for the stuffy Whitehall bureaucracy in London or the prissily reformist New Deal administration in Washington while at the same time leading another, more exhilarating, secret life.

But the greatest harm perpetrated before and during the war was not done by spies or fellow-travelers in important positions in Britain and the U.S. Rather it was the harm done by policy. Government officials with impeccable democratic credentials had come to feel that it was only realistic to try to propitiate the Soviet Union, and much more important to gain Stalin's trust and good will for the postwar period than to make a fuss over Poland or Rumania, countries which had never known democracy in any case (!). On this point Nikolai Tolstoy is unduly harsh on Western politicians like Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan. The sad truth is that many others in the British and American wartime governments shared the same view.

BUT why did Stalin's regime not collapse under the horrendous weight of its own crimes, errors, and stupidities? One must not underestimate the tyrant's political skill (Tolstoy occasionally does so). He was a superb actor, a master illusionmaker. In the 30's he persuaded the Soviet people that the land was teeming with "wreckers," German and Japanese spies, etc., and that continuous bloody hecatombs were needed if Russia were to be saved from utter ruin. If so many sophisticated foreigners were taken in by the falsehoods and absurdities of the purge trials, is it surprising that the majority of the Russian people came to believe that mass terror was a necessary remedy for the alleged epidemic of treason?

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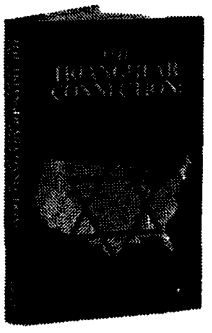

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Although the catastrophic Russian defeats during the first months of the war were the direct fault of Stalin's disregard of repeated warnings about the imminence of German attack, as well as his purge of the army, by 1943 he was being acclaimed as the savior of his country, not only in the West but by his own people, whom he had subjected to the horrors of forced collectivization and the great terror.

Communism has been the great scavenger of modern history, feeding on the achievements, as well as on the mistakes and weaknesses, of its rivals. Stalin's career epitomizes this quality of Communism. His reign, as a Soviet poet noted (under Khrushchev), was one long war against his own nation. It was *despite* Communism and Stalin that Russia became a great industrial power (it had been well on the way before the 1917 revolution) and managed to defeat the German invader. Yet for many, including some Western historians, it is still Stalin who pushed a primitive society onto the path that led the USSR to become one of the two superpowers of the world, and he who turned the tide of the war. Nikolai Tolstoy's book helps remind us of the fraudulence of such myths.

Stalin's Secret War brings into focus the crucial role played by the security organs, even during the war. "If a state's degree of liberty or oppression is measured by the extent of coercive powers employed to sustain its government, then Soviet Russia must be the most oppressive power the world has ever seen," Tolstoy writes. As against the sufferings of the millions, he depicts the status enjoyed by a few: "So great were the luxuries and privileges enjoyed by the party chosen, they might have seemed to belong to a different race from that 95 percent of the population of the USSR which lived in conditions of unimaginable destitution and suffering." This was the society about which so many egalitarian illusions were nourished in foreign lands.

DESPITE occasional slips, *Stalin's Secret War* presents a realistic picture of one of the bleakest episodes in modern history. (One such slip occurs toward the end of the book, when Tolstoy attributes to Stalin a design to attack Western Europe, a plan averted only because of the despot's sudden death in 1953. This hypothesis is based on some very questionable evidence, and clashes with all we know about the last phase of Stalin's rule, when what he did apparently contemplate was a massive domestic purge on a scale similar to that of 1936-39.) Such reminders are necessary not only for the sake of the historical record but also because in many respects Stalinism still permeates the Soviet system. The very euphemisms by which the dead tyrant's successors have tried to explain the terrible past—"cult of personality," "violations of socialist legality"—demonstrate the hold his personality has retained over the minds of the present leaders. How empty those two ritualistic phrases are when set against the martyrdom of entire nations and the millions of victims. These horrors were brought about not because of any cult or legal irregularities, but through the lust for power and the lawlessness inherent in the Soviet system, qualities which found their consummate expression in Stalinism.

Quite apart from those who perished or were inmates of the Gulag, the nation as a whole became politically anesthetized by the terror. The present rulers, while lacking the late despot's daring and ferocity, still cannot afford to tell the people the unvarnished truth about the past, lest they be awakened to the reality of the system under which they live.

Uptown

THIS WAS HARLEM: A CULTURAL PORTRAIT 1900-1950. By JERVIS ANDERSON. *Farrar Straus & Giroux. 390 pp. $17.95.*

Reviewed by PETER SHAW

WITHIN memory, the section of upper Manhattan known for the past twenty years as a depress-

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PETER SHAW *writes frequently about American culture for* COMMENTARY *and other periodicals. He is the author of* The Character of John Adams *and* American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution.

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ing, forbidding slum was a vibrant and self-confident community. Harlem was the place where black achievers in business and the arts came to test their mettle and enjoy their success. In a time of racial exclusion, both economic and social, this was the place that best represented the aspirations of American blacks—including their desire for the recognition and respect of white society. Harlem was, as Adam Clayton Powell put it, "the symbol of liberty and the Promised Land to Negroes everywhere."

What happened? The question underlies Jervis Anderson's social and cultural history, which he brings to an end with the 1940's. But the book in fact touches only lightly on the causes of social decay. Anderson is concerned to recapture rather than to explain the past. To this end he proceeds by quoting extensively from observers of the early Harlem, whatever their prejudices, and he illustrates his story by means of enumeration and the accumulation of detail. Thus he offers lists of the black journalists of the early part of the century, among whom was James Weldon Johnson; he gives us the names of the great performers, black and white, who appeared at the Savoy ballroom starting in 1926—Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey; he lists the inhabitants of Harlem's two privileged social enclaves, Strivers Row and Sugar Hill, including the tenants of 409 Edgecombe Avenue in Sugar Hill—W.E.B. DuBois, Roy Wilkins, Josh White, and Thurgood Marshall among them.

HARLEM grew into a black community largely because of developments in the real-estate market. The old San Juan Hill and Tenderloin districts on Manhattan's West Side, where blacks lived before the turn of the century, were partly torn down and partly made prohibitively expensive by the building of Pennsylvania Station in 1903. At about the same time, because of over-building above 110th Street, the northern boundary of Central Park, developers finally became willing to rent to blacks. The first to relocate moved into a relatively narrow area between 130th and 140th Streets. Eventually Harlem extended to nearly the width of Manhattan, and from 110th to 155th Streets.

Many had left the Tenderloin area to escape the vice and crime notoriously associated with it. These people formed a conservative, bourgeois nexus for the new community. Within a few years their churches followed them northward, institutionalizing what amounted to a positive rage for respectability. Eventually, however, Harlem came to include not only families but also the colorful, raucous, and sometimes sinister elements that had made up the old downtown "Negro Bohemia." The result was a transmission of the old district's distinctive mixture of poverty and high style—a combination that could be found in one and the same individual depending on

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whether the time was midweek or weekend.

From early on, then, the evolution of Harlem involved a contrast and struggle between two styles of life. Although memoirists and historians tend to concentrate on the high life, Anderson has not neglected the everyday. By 1919, according to one recollection he quotes, "there were Negroes in every conceivable profession, business, and trade." These included doctors, lawyers, dentists, druggists, journalists, florists, beauty-parlor operators, and the real-estate agents who had made settlement possible in the first place. Peculiar to this community was its large body of clergymen, including an oversupply of storefront fanatics and fakes, and its many civil-rights workers—then called "race leaders."

PERHAPS more than anything else, it was the visible evidence that a community could be run by blacks that made Harlem a center of hope and pride. In the arts this pride took the form of ethnically distinct techniques that soon became universally influential. Ragtime music introduced a special kind of intricate syncopation to music, and also led the way out of the racial self-denigration of the prevailing minstrel-derived entertainments. Ragtime swept both black and white society. Ultimately, as Anderson shows, it became, along with jazz, a leading influence in the 1920's breakdown of rigid moralities.

Harlem and Greenwich Village were two world-renowned outposts of personal and social freedom. The Village, one may say, offered a place to live and work in a bohemian or unconventional manner. There was an unusual degree of economic and class integration there, and couples could more easily live together out of wedlock, or in homosexual liaison. Harlem, on the other hand, offered temporary, gestural freedoms. Here blacks and whites mingled freely and danced with one another. And here, for those who came for the entertainment, the sexual daring —which included ambiguously naughty lyrics and transvestite performers—enacted the age's idea of sexual liberation.

Anderson does not scant the racial exclusions that persisted despite the symbolic integration of Harlem night life. In fact, he explicitly links the history of Harlem to racial practices. It was a race riot in San Juan Hill that spurred the first West Siders to move to Harlem, and postwar race riots in 1919 gave emerging civil-rights advocates a greater militancy. The proletarian-protest strain in the writings of the Harlem Renaissance also seems to have been influenced by the riots of 1919. Yet it must be repeated that for all the justified resentment against white society, the defining spirit of Harlem remained a positive one. Memoirists recalled "a wonderful vivacity and excitement," sustained by "a self-esteem, an enormous self-assuredness, an enormous optimism." Harlemites were, in the words of a black preacher, "blessed or cursed with a wonderful optimism."

IT ALL started to come apart in the 30's. In 1930 half of Harlem's population of 200,000 was on relief. Riots in 1935 and 1943 poisoned the atmosphere and made visitors fearful of traveling uptown. In accounting for the community's decline, Anderson lists the deaths of prominent community leaders by 1940, and the dispersal of a significant portion of the middle class by 1950. Yet the dispersal, at least, was a product of success, not failure. It does not seem true to say that Harlem declined mainly because of the Depression and racial bitterness.

There had always been hard times for the area's large population of the poor, as Anderson shows. Furthermore, at least one riot—after the fabulously popular Joe Louis defeated Max Schmeling for the heavyweight title in 1938—grew not out of a spirit of protest but of celebration. The great riot of 1943 came at a time of improved economic conditions, spurred to a great extent by the opening of war-plant jobs in 1941.

The decline of Harlem seems to have proceeded from social more than from economic causes. There had always been a steady in-migration of rural Southerners and West Indians, but when a comparable out-migration of the successful got under way, the community was left without leadership. A further loss of social control came about with the decline in community institutions all over America. In Harlem these institutions had been particularly crucial. The middle class there, calling itself "the better element of the race," had stood for more than respectability and repression. Church congregations—as long as they remained influential and relatively well supported with money —organized charities, as did the many fraternal and civic organizations: black Masons, Pythians, Oddfellows, Elks, YM-, and YWCA's, the NAACP, the National Urban League, and local Democratic and Republican clubs. Equally important, perhaps, these groups were responsible for social rituals ranging from casual promenading to elaborate weddings and funerals (Anderson lists the famous ones) that expressed a sense of solidarity and continuity. The loss of all this, as Jervis Anderson's charming and elegantly written account makes one acutely aware, was a terrible shame.

A Public Life

THE DAY IS SHORT: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. By MORRIS B. ABRAM. *Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 280 pp. $14.95.*

Reviewed by NATHAN GLAZER

MORRIS ABRAM is a former president of Brandeis University, of the American Jewish Committee, and of the Field Foundation; a former candidate for the Senate from New York; and a man who has held many official appointments, from the United Nations to committees investigating nursing homes in New York. Still only in his sixties and vigorous, he has been impelled to set down his autobiography at this relatively early date because of his long battle with an extremely virulent life-threatening form of cancer. It is this experience that has brought a man who is preeminently a public figure to write

NATHAN GLAZER, *a frequent contributor, is professor of education and sociology at Harvard.*

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so surprisingly personal an account of his life.

Yet everything in this book, whether public or private, seems to show the same man—the vivid and harrowing account of the complex treatment for his leukemia, with its terrible effects on the body; the twenty-year fight with the county-unit rule in Georgia, which first brought Abram to national attention; his strong stand against racial preferences in the 70's. And the man shown is active and forceful, not one to let events take their own course without involving himself in shaping them.

Morris Abram was born in a small Georgia town, the son of an unsuccessful East European Jewish shopkeeper, an immigrant from Rumania, and a German Jewish mother, the daughter of a doctor, who could not conceal her disappointment in her husband. The thin Jewish thread keeps emerging in Abram's life, turning him into something rather different from the man he would have been had his father been, for example, a Baptist shopkeeper.

Thus, in this tiny Georgia town, with too few Jews to support a synagogue or a rabbi, there happened to be a Dutch-born Jewish socialist, the editor of a newspaper, who in his many conversations with young Morris Abram argued that the Jews inevitably play a progressive role in history, and who proposed that his bright disciple write a book, to be titled *Stepping Stones of Civilization*, that would detail the contributions of the Jews from monotheism to Marx, Freud, and Einstein. One is reminded of the town in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, except that here the apostle of progress was a Jew—as would not be surprising in a small Southern town.

Another early experience: as a bright young debater in the local high school, Morris Abram was asked by the pastor of the church to present the Jewish view of Jesus Christ. He may not have been very qualified, but then who in Fitzgerald, Georgia, was? At least he scoured the town for every relevant book on the subject. Again: at the University of Georgia, his modest Jewish tie led him to discover the loud, seemingly street-wise New York Jews who had come to the inexpensive campus in Athens because their grades did not qualify them for free tuition in the city college system. I loathed them for being so ostentatiously Jewish and for their public scorn of Georgia. . . . It was this boisterous bunch that had set up picket lines in front of the Palace Theater protesting the exorbitant thirty-five cent admission charge. . . . But I was also drawn to them. Their world was big, foreign, full of new ideas.

Abram was selected as a Rhodes Scholar, but the war prevented his class from going to Oxford. He had a year at the University of Chicago as a consolation, and after the war was finally able to get to Oxford. Returning to Atlanta, he did not win the offer to a major local law firm his accomplishments might have warranted—he leaves no doubt that this was because he was a Jew—but joined a small firm and, in a move that was consonant with his youthful experiences but different from the pattern of successful Atlanta lawyers, embarked on an effort to break into and affect public life, as a liberal.

The great barrier to him, and to other liberals, was Georgia's county-unit rule, which radically reduced the weight of the Atlanta metropolitan counties in the crucial Democratic primaries. Abram fought against this in the courts for twenty years. The long battle, with its briefs and appeals in district courts, circuit courts, and finally the Supreme Court brought him to the attention of what can only be called the Northern liberal establishment. In 1959 he was asked to join the board of the Twentieth Century Fund in New York, and he does not conceal his awe at meeting Adolf Berle, Benjamin Cohen, David Lilienthal, James Rowe, Robert Lynd, Francis Biddle, Charles Taft, J. Robert Oppenheimer:

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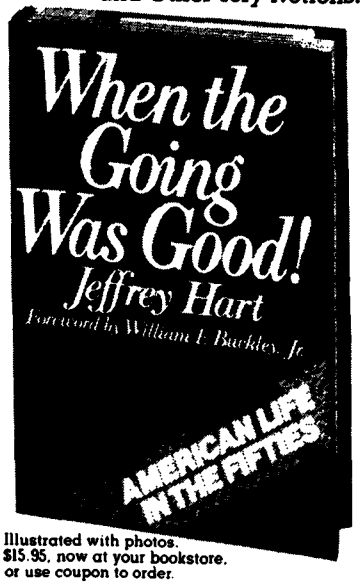

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[H]ere, around this table, was a collective experience and expertise that surpassed the sum total of everything and everyone that I had yet known. Why was I elected to this group of notables? I had not published, held high office, or lectured from a distinguished university chair. Had these men picked me as a Southern liberal, to bring to their round table an informed viewpoint of the changing South?

Of course, that was precisely why Abram was there. And about the same time, he was being invited to speak to the board of the Field Foundation—Adlai Stevenson, Lloyd Garrison, Ralph Bunche, and so on. These new connections led him to leave Georgia and go to New York, to take a partnership in Lloyd Garrison's law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton, and Garrison.

OF ALL the positions held by Abram, it would appear that the one he wanted the most, and felt most suited for in prospect, was the one that brought him the greatest disappointment. This was the presidency of Brandeis, which he assumed in the late 60's. Abram approached Brandeis in the same spirit of awe he had felt for the giants of the New Deal gathered at the Twentieth Century Fund. His respect for the life of the mind and higher education had been unsullied by any close contact with universities. It was his misfortune to become president when Brandeis's founder, Abram Sachar, had only formally resigned, and was keeping a close check on his successor. It was also a time of black student takeovers, which, despite the fact that Brandeis was then devoting many of its slim resources to programs for ghetto youth, were serious and damaging.

If higher education was not what Abram had expected—"I must confess that if there was ever an experience in my life that toughened me for the crucial battle with illness, it was my tenure as president of Brandeis"—there were greater satisfactions in being president of the American Jewish Committee, at a time (in the early 60's) when the agency was attempting to persuade the Roman Catholic Church to withdraw the charge of deicide against Jews. That issue was settled to the Committee's satisfaction. Others he dealt with in the 1960's are still with us, and if anything in graver form. In 1967, the Six-Day War erupted, and American Jewish organizations found, for the first time, that they could not expect liberal Protestants to give Israel their unstinting support. At the same time, a split was developing between Jews and blacks, both on issues of domestic civil rights and on support for Israel.

THE "Jewish connection" played a role in making Morris Abram a Southern liberal. His chosen ground was the Georgia county-unit rule, which he stuck with through decades, and on which he finally achieved success. That fight, as we have seen, brought Abram to national prominence and led him to move to New York. Until then, Jewish interests and activities had been peripheral to him. But once in New York he seems to have discovered that the larger stage was in part a Jewish stage, or in any case that the Jewish world offered the most interesting opportunities. But then this strengthened experience with the Jewish community led Abram into positions on some key issues that divorced him from the same liberal allies who had first brought him to New York.

The two issues I have already named were crucial: one had to do with the question of whether the protection of civil rights should mean public policies giving preference to certain specified ethnic and racial minorities, and the second had to do with attitudes toward Israel, which in practice also meant attitudes toward the United Nations, the Third World, human rights, and indeed to the role of the United States in world affairs. On these, Abram broke his lifelong commitment to the Democratic party in 1980 and came out openly for Reagan. And, as he reports sadly, it was on these issues too that he came into conflict with the Field Foundation, and resigned after a two-decade connection.

His path paralleled that of many other liberals, who found in the course of the 70's that they did not agree with their former allies on many issues. Jewish interests, Jewish connections, had played a signal role in bringing many to liberalism. They played an equally substantial role in moving many away from what liberalism began to mean in the course of the 1970's. Morris Abram looks back fondly, as many do, to the liberalism of the Democratic coalition from Roosevelt to Humphrey. He can say, as many do, that he did not change, liberalism did.

Undoubtedly there are those who might see in this development the narrow victory of a concern with a partial interest, that of the Jews, over that of a larger interest, perhaps "humanity." But as Abram's life shows, the Jewish connection cuts both ways: it brings individuals to a concern with larger interests, but it also reminds them that even the largest of interests must be judged by their immediate and concrete impact. There are no answers given from on high, to Jews or to others, on how to reconcile the universal and the particular, but Morris Abram's life is a good and respectable example of how one man, who is still serving the larger and the smaller communities of which he is a part, has tried to effect such a reconciliation.

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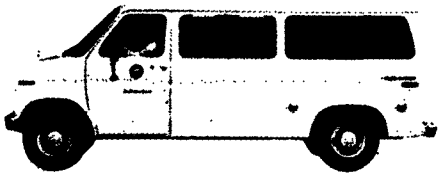

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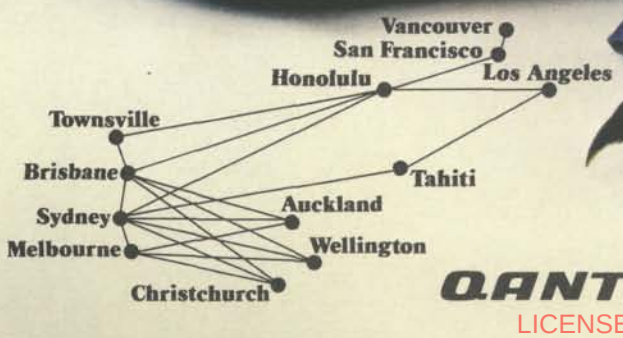

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